



Linking the Unemployed to Jobs:

Integrated Transit Planning and Workforce Development

Fast Facts

- » Disadvantaged job seekers in the Minneapolis–St. Paul region face a spatial mismatch between where they live and where many job vacancies are, and a skills mismatch between their current skills and what employers require.
- » Planned improvements to the regional transit system would offer significant gains in job access for residents of economically disadvantaged areas such as North Minneapolis, Brooklyn Park, and Midway St. Paul.
- » For the region as a whole, transit improvements alone—without coordinated workforce development efforts—would have relatively little impact on regional spatial mismatch.
- » The greatest prospects for success lie in workforce development efforts targeted to specific local areas and focused on in-demand jobs that pay a living wage, have low education requirements, and are transit accessible.

Project Background and Design

Disadvantaged job seekers often find themselves in a double bind: They may be qualified for many entry-level jobs but have no way of reaching suburban employment centers; they may be able to reach many nearby jobs easily but lack the qualifications for them. These two statements describe the interconnected problems of spatial mismatch and skills mismatch.

Efforts to address spatial mismatch often focus on transportation, such as improved or specialized public transit services. Remedies for skills mismatch include skill-building and occupational training programs. Policymakers have generally separated the two.

In this study, University of Minnesota experts analyzed spatial and skill mismatches in the Twin Cities seven-county metropolitan area and examined the potential of a new approach: integrated transit planning and workforce development.

The team performed these research tasks:

- » A regional analysis of patterns and magnitudes of mismatch over time and across multiple transit development scenarios
- » A workforce analysis of high-demand occupations in high-demand, low-turnover sectors that

are least likely to require postsecondary education and likely to pay a living wage

- » Neighborhood-level case studies to provide localized qualitative detail

Project Findings and Policy Implications

According to the research, spatial mismatch is a serious problem in the Twin Cities region and it appears to have worsened since the turn of the millennium. The biggest concentrations of unemployed workers lack frequent transit service to some of the richest concentrations of job vacancies, particularly jobs in the south and southwest metro.

Some specific findings:

- » Accessibility to job vacancies via transit varies significantly by residential location and industry sector, with vacancies in certain sectors much more easily accessible from some parts of the region than others.
- » While transit access is generally good in the inner city, some areas of intense disadvantage—such as North Minneapolis, Brooklyn Park, and Midway St. Paul—have relatively poor access to entry-level jobs despite being near major em-

ployment centers.

- » The seven highest-demand industry sectors in the region have a significant number of occupations in which most job vacancies do not require postsecondary education or long-term training and offer a livable median hourly wage. Examples include machinists in the manufacturing sector and nursing assistants in the health care and social assistance sector.
- » Some promising occupations appear in multiple industries. These occupations, such as clerks and administrative assistants, offer opportunities for combined training programs across sectors.
- » Transit planners and workforce development professionals see a need for greater coordination, particularly in suburban areas. There also is broad agreement that connecting urban workers with suburban jobs requires addressing the first-mile/last-mile problem at the worksite end of the commute.

The researchers also analyzed the impacts of the proposed regional transit system* and found it would significantly increase access to jobs for disadvantaged areas. For example, they estimate a 23 percent increase for Brooklyn Park, 18 percent for North Minneapolis, and 17 percent for the Gateway Corridor along I-94 east of St. Paul.

At the scale of the region as a whole, the mismatch between unemployed workers and job vacancies would lessen with the proposed regional transit system, but only slightly. Transit improvements alone—without coordinated workforce development efforts—would have relatively little effect on regional spatial mismatch.

* Includes the Green Line (southwest) and Blue Line (northwest) extensions; Gold Line, Rush Line, and Red Rock corridors (east metro); and additional bus rapid transit lines.

Research Team

- » Principal investigator: Yingling Fan, associate professor, Humphrey School of Public Affairs
- » Co-investigators: Andrew Guthrie and Kirti Vardhan Das, research fellows, Humphrey School

Recommendations

The team's policy recommendations center on finding "sweet spots" for coordinated transit planning and workforce development and creating a future transit system to serve the needs of disadvantaged workers:

- » Redefine "accessible jobs" based on access by transit, not geography.
- » Consider the entire pipeline linking workers with jobs: individuals' skills and interests, available training, jobs reachable by transit, and employers interested in hiring workers for those jobs.
- » Collect data on job-seekers' skills to help select occupations for training programs, and tailor those programs to participants' capabilities and needs.
- » Identify employers who stand to benefit from engaging with workforce development and transit planning efforts. The employers may include those facing labor supply problems in inaccessible suburban locations as well as those with ambitious goals for diverse hiring.
- » Redefine flexible transportation to take into account disadvantaged workers' often complex lives and nontraditional schedules. Serving disadvantaged workers well with transit will mean fast, frequent, regular regional service, and local connections tailored to demand.
- » Pursue diverse first-mile/last-mile solutions to connect workplaces with transit lines. Engage transportation management organizations and also consider employer or district shuttles, car or bicycle sharing, or partnerships with transportation networking companies.
- » Pursue transit-oriented economic development to direct future job growth to transit-friendly areas.

Sponsors

- » Hennepin County, Minnesota
- » Jay and Rose Phillips Family Foundation of Minnesota
- » McKnight Foundation

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