

Commuting in Context: A Qualitative Study of Transportation Challenges for Disadvantaged Job Seekers in Chicago, IL

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Executive Summary

In Chicago and elsewhere, access to employment opportunities varies dramatically across individuals, racial groups, and neighborhoods. While quantitative studies have demonstrated important commute disparities by income and race, less is known about how social contexts, transportation systems, and employment dynamics interact to produce transportation barriers to employment for disadvantaged job seekers.

This study adopts a qualitative approach to identify transportation barriers and potential solutions from the perspectives of disadvantaged job seekers, as well as job coaches who work directly with them to obtain employment. In 2019, the research team conducted focus groups and brief surveys with job seekers (n=82) and job coaches (n=42) at employment centers on the South and West sides of Chicago. Most job seeker respondents were Black (78%) and did not have a four-year college degree (81%). Results demonstrate that disadvantaged workers experience a complex web of transportation and intersecting barriers that make it difficult to travel to and retain employment. In fact, almost three-quarters of respondents indicated that transportation was a barrier to getting or keeping a job.

The current geography of opportunity requires that many disadvantaged job seekers travel far outside of their communities to access quality jobs, therefore absorbing high transportation costs—both temporal and financial. Many quality suburban job sites are completely inaccessible for those without a car because there are no nearby transit routes or the schedules do not align with work shifts. Employer hiring practices related to the length or mode of an applicant's commute make it hard for disadvantaged job seekers to secure employment. Respondents who rely on transit described the poor customer experience caused by the condition of buses and trains, reliability problems, limited frequency, and broken elevators, but transit agencies do not directly control many issues negatively influencing the total transit trip experience. Crime and violence were prominent themes, as respondents reported personal security concerns, particularly related to using transit and active modes. Respondents also identified the transportation inequities between North side communities and South and West side communities, from transit service reliability to bicycle infrastructure.

Transportation adaptations to cope with these burdens include purchasing a personal vehicle or using ride-hail services, which provide a sense of autonomy. These strategies may be appropriate interim solutions until the region addresses the historic and holistic forces that keep disadvantaged workers inequitably burdened. Employer-oriented solutions include moving closer to employee pools or to locations with more transportation choices, aligning shifts with transit schedules, subsidizing transit fares, or offering shuttles to quality transit hubs. Transportation agencies need funding to improve the customer experience and expand locations served by transit.

However, some of the transportation burdens that respondents identified are harder to capture in conventional models and require non-transportation strategies. Supporting new and existing businesses on the South and West sides and fostering quality jobs in closer proximity to workers could make a lengthy suburban commute a choice, not a necessity. Additionally, in order to address the personal security concerns that inhibit mobility, solutions must align with social justice experts who are leading socially and racially just systems transformation. This study concludes that workforce transportation solutions must look beyond individual worker adaptations or improving transportation efficiency, instead proactively and comprehensively addressing a range of associated issues that disadvantaged workers and job seekers face.

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Introduction

Transportation systems provide a wide range of benefits, including access to employment. Even as home-based work trips account for a decreasing share of all trips, just 14 percent in 2017 (Federal Highway Administration, 2019), access to jobs is nonetheless a critical factor for the economic success of individuals, families, communities, and the nation.

The ease of accessing employment opportunities varies dramatically across individuals, racial groups, communities, and regions. Extensive research on employment accessibility has focused on the spatial mismatch hypothesis. Kain (1968) labeled it decades ago, observing the distance between concentrations of low-income Black residents in inner cities and entry-level job growth in the suburbs. Researchers, such as Hess (2005) and Blumenberg (2002), have countered some of the suburban job growth emphasis by observing high access to concentrations of jobs from centrally located city neighborhoods. Research has also documented that the disparities in transportation time access to jobs vary more by automobile ownership than by geographic location (see Grengs, 2010).

Local and national inequities in travel and commuting are well-documented. Chicago households headed by a person of color have higher rates of households without vehicles (29.6%) than all households (26.9%). The slight majority of Chicago households below poverty do not have a vehicle (51.7%) (authors' calculations based on AASHTO, n.d.), although automobile travel and access do remain important for many low-income populations nationally (see Blumenberg & Pierce, 2014). Nationally and locally, transit service speed differentials exist for bus service versus rail service (Neff & Dickens, 2017), even though in other national contexts, bus investments can make bus speed competitive with rail. While many White, non-Latinx transit users ride buses and many Black and Latinx transit users ride rail, nationally, bus users are disproportionately Black, and rail users are relatively more White, non-Latinx (Taylor & Morris, 2015). In Chicago, average commute time by public transit is 51.6 minutes for Black workers, 44.1 for Latinx commuters, and 37.7 for White workers (Henricks et al., 2017). Across all modes of travel, the average commute time differential between Black and White workers in the city aggregates to about one extra work week in lost time for Black commuters (Henricks et al., 2017). Non-motorized racial disparities in Chicago include racialized policing (Wisniewski, 2019, September 23) and inequitable pedestrian fatality rates by race (City of Chicago, 2017). Given the documented job accessibility inequities by mode, this report focuses primarily on non-single occupant vehicle commutes—carpooling, transit, biking, and walking—which account for just less than half of City of Chicago residents' commutes.

While existing quantitative studies demonstrate important commute inequities by income and race, less is known about how intersecting systems of community, structural racism, transportation, and employment dynamics interact to shape the commute experience among people of color, those without four-year college degrees, and others facing employment barriers. Initial qualitative work (Lowe & Mosby, 2016) shows that travel models may underestimate transportation burdens because of workplace demands around scheduling and other social factors. This study adopts a qualitative approach to identify understudied and intersecting factors in lived transportation experiences of disadvantaged job seekers. Based on 10 focus groups with job seekers and five with job coaches at federally funded American Job Centers¹ in the City of Chicago, this study finds that disadvantaged workers experience a

¹ <https://www.dol.gov/general/topic/training/onestop>

complex web of transportation barriers to employment, including those related to jobs-population spatial mismatch and perceptions of security, making many of their commutes a significant burden and a source of stress. Because of intersecting issues, solutions must look beyond individual worker adaptations or improving transportation efficiency to address workforce accessibility problems holistically with understandings of historic factors and community contexts. The following section provides background on the City of Chicago. The next section describes the focus group methods and participants, and key findings follow. The report closes with a discussion of cross-cutting findings to inform discussions of holistic strategies to address workforce accessibility.

Chicago Context

The City of Chicago has a population of 2.7 million residents (CMAP, 2019). American Community Survey data (2013-2017) show a population of almost 33 percent non-Latinx White, 30 percent non-Latinx Black, 29 percent Latinx, 6 percent Asian, and 2 percent other (CMAP, 2019). Black population grew dramatically from 1950-1970 and peaked in 1980. Latinx growth was substantial in the 1990s and 2000s, although most recently, Asian residents are the fastest growing racial group (Scarborough et al., 2020). Unemployment rates in the city vary dramatically, with Black unemployment rates more than four times and Latinx unemployment rates double White unemployment rates. This is not simply a factor of education, as Black Chicagoans with advanced degrees have higher rates of unemployment than White residents with four-year degrees (Hendricks et al, 2017).

The distribution of total jobs and high-quality jobs is uneven across the region. More jobs are located in the City of Chicago than in suburban Cook County (which contains Chicago) or in any of the region's individual counties. However, when aggregated, suburban jobs account for the majority (67%) of employment in the region. In addition, quality jobs are not evenly distributed. The Brookings Institution defines good jobs as stable positions paying middle-class wages and defines promising jobs as those with the potential to lead to good jobs within ten years. For those without four-year college degrees, good and promising jobs are only 16 percent of regional employment opportunities. A slightly greater proportion of suburban jobs are good and promising for those without four-year degrees. Because of this higher proportion and the greater total number of jobs in the suburbs, the vast majority (71%) of good and promising jobs for those without college degrees are located outside of the City of Chicago (personal correspondence, CMAP).²

Overall, 14 percent of the region's workers commute from surrounding counties into Chicago, but only 10 percent do a reverse commute from the City of Chicago to outlying counties or rural areas (CMAP, 2016). American Community Survey data (2018, 5-year data Table S0801) report a high share of Chicago residents that work within the City itself: 75.1 percent.

Public transit is an important transportation mode for many workers in the region. The Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) coordinates and plans public transportation in northeastern Illinois. Its service area includes Cook, Will, DuPage, Kane, Lake, and McHenry counties, encompassing 284 municipalities, including the City of Chicago, and providing 2 million trips each weekday (Regional Transportation Authority, 2020). The region's transit service providers are the Chicago Transit Authority

² Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning analysis of Illinois Department of Employment Security (ES-202) and Brookings Opportunity Industries data. Analysis based on 2015 private sector jobs eligible for unemployment insurance.

(CTA), Metra, and Pace Suburban Bus and Pace ADA Paratransit. CTA provides rapid transit and bus service primarily in the City of Chicago, but also in some surrounding suburbs. In 2018, ridership averaged 1.5 million weekday unlinked trips (Federal Transit Administration, 2018a). Metra is the region's commuter rail system, with 11 lines that connect the north, west, and south suburbs to downtown Chicago. In 2018, ridership across all train lines averaged 251,012 weekday unlinked trips (Federal Transit Administration, 2018b). Pace Suburban Bus provides suburban bus service to the Chicago region, as well as paratransit, dial-a-ride, and vanpool programs. In 2018, bus ridership averaged 103,456 weekday unlinked trips (Federal Transit Administration, 2018c) and paratransit averaged 12,492 weekday unlinked trips (Federal Transit Administration, 2018d).

Methods and Participants

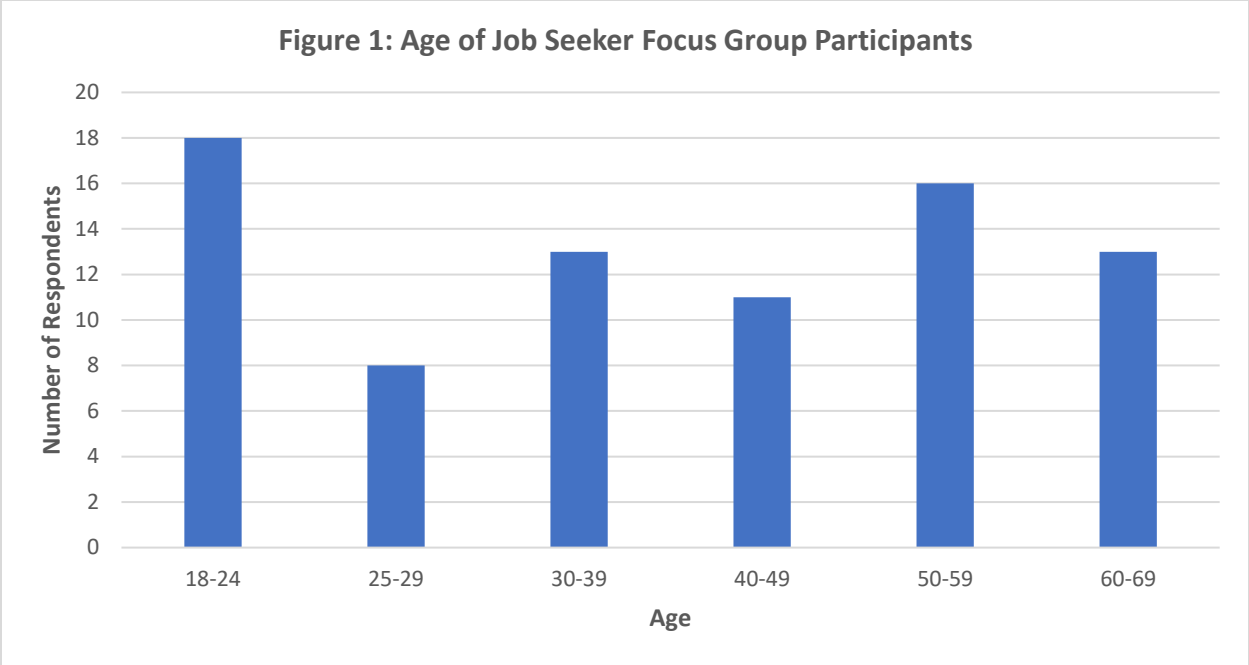
This project sought to understand the intersecting, multiple dimensions of job accessibility challenges, as well as potential solutions from the perspective of disadvantaged job seekers, people of color, and those who work directly with them on obtaining employment. To do so, the team collected data via multiple methods: a brief survey and focus group guide designed for job seekers, as well as a different brief survey and focus group guide designed for job coaches, who work directly with job seekers and employers. Surveys were used to collect demographic information and for closed-end questions. Focus group questions were open-ended, and the group discussions were recorded and transcribed (see appendices for instruments and survey results). To understand the perspectives and types of issues raised from the participants' viewpoint, the research team used an iterative coding approach for focus group analysis. Coding involved collaboration with project partners from Equitcity and the Metropolitan Planning Council and was based on themes that emerged from the transcriptions, rather than pre-determined categories. The partners created 11 codes from the job seeker transcriptions and 11 codes from the job coach transcriptions, with some common codes. Each transcription was coded line by line in the cloud-based qualitative software program Dedoose. Next, the team queried codes from all transcriptions, reviewed the results, and summarized them to generate the findings sections. Subsequent sections reference the internal focus group codes associated with each quotation (job seeker focus groups numbered in the 100s and job coach focus groups in the 200s).

The research team recruited job seeker and job coach participants at five privately operated sites in Chicago that are part of the Chicago Cook County Workforce Partnership (see sites in Figure 7).

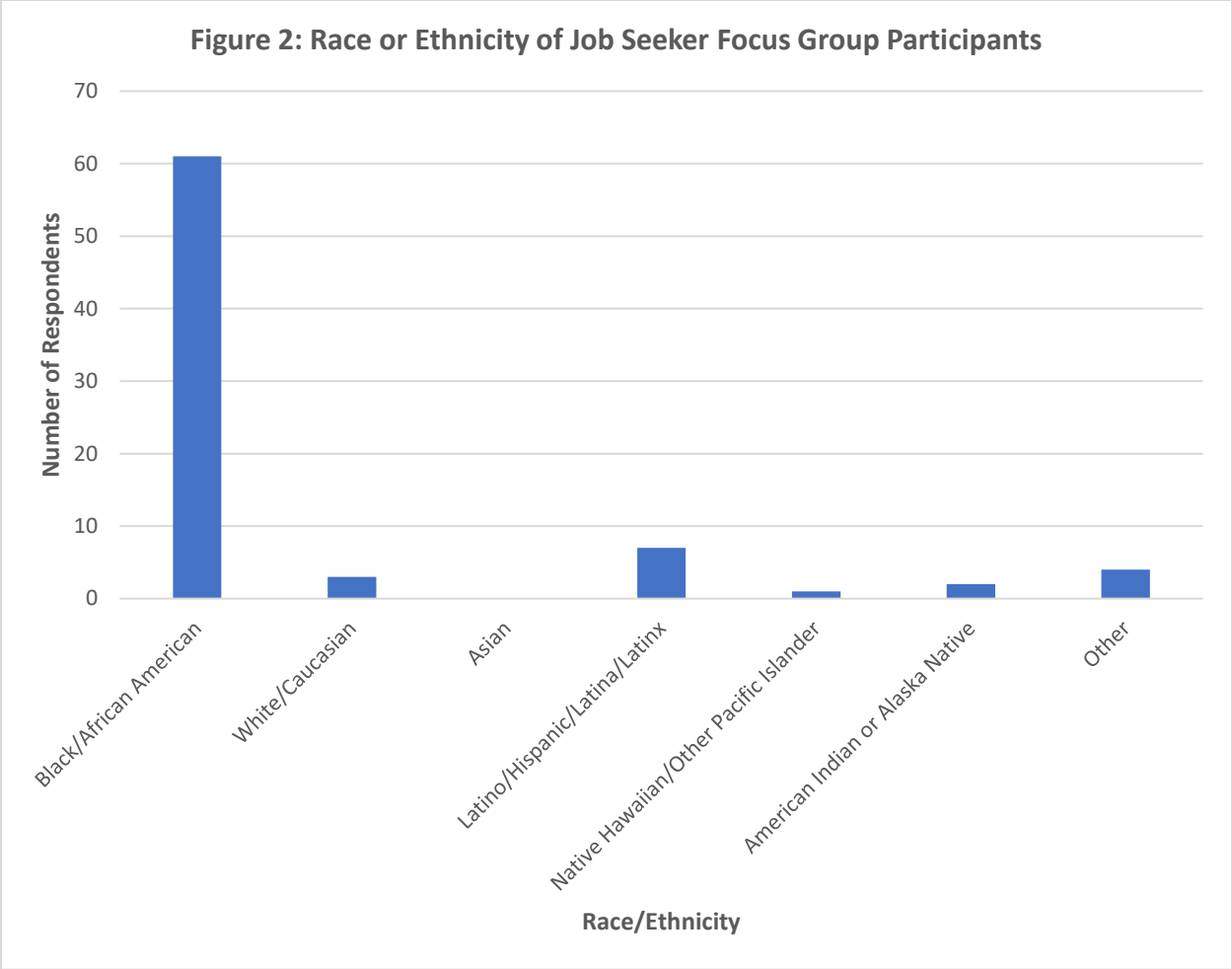
Job Seeker Focus Groups and Participants

There were 10 focus groups (two each at five sites) held with job seekers in Summer and Fall 2019. Groups ranged in size from five to 12 participants, with an average of 8.2 participants (82 total, although not all participants answered all questions). Job seeker participants received a \$50 debit card for their participation. Participants reported on a variety of demographic characteristics, as well as several questions regarding job access, the latter of which will be reported in the findings section.

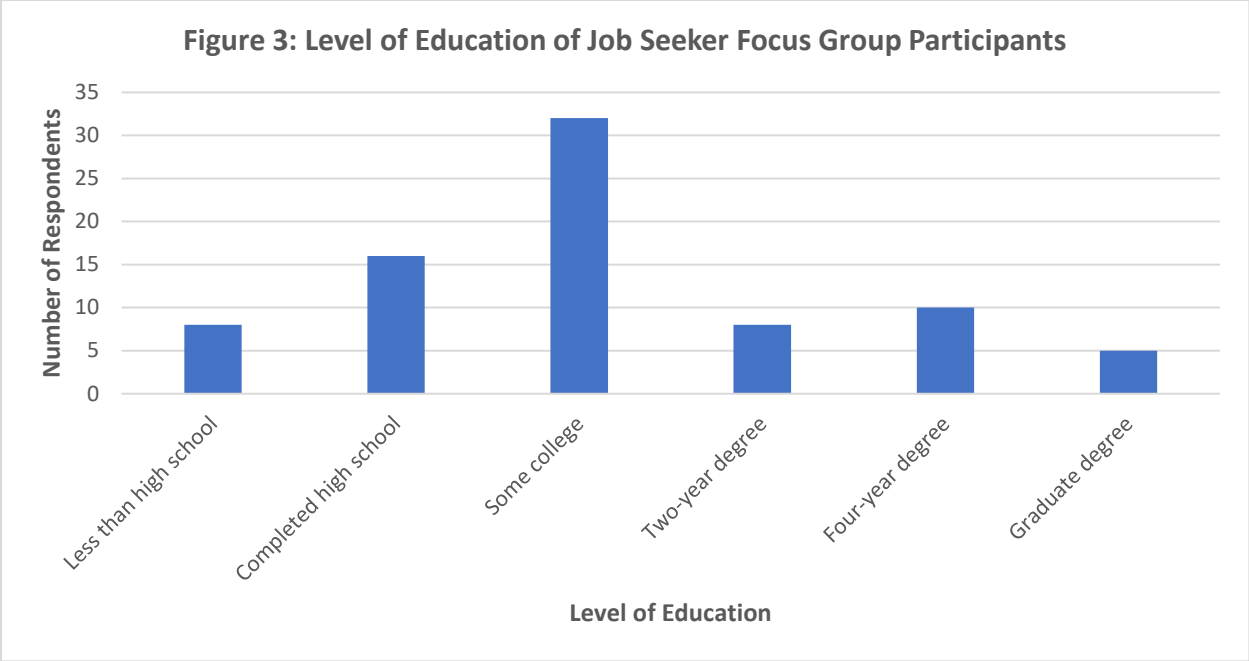
Participants ranged in age from 18 to 69, with a mean and median age of 41 (Figure 1). Almost a third were under the age of 30, but other ages were well represented.



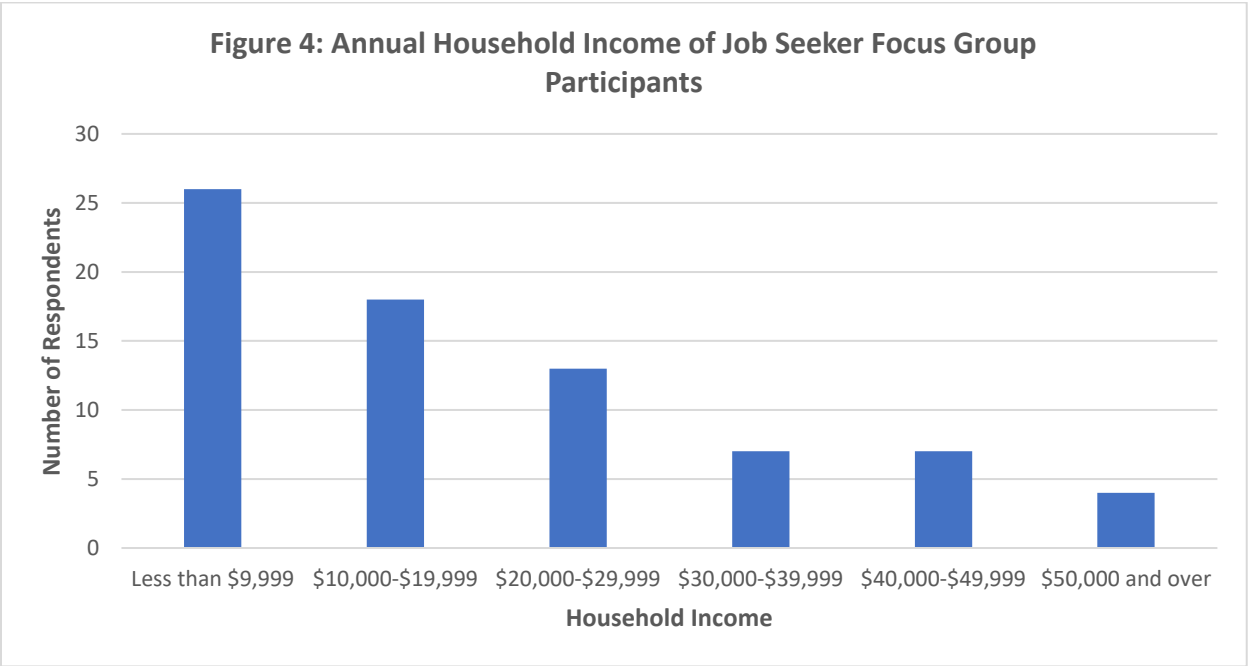
While the Chicago Cook County Workforce Partnership sites support a diverse set of job seekers, most of its clients are people of color and those who do not hold a college degree. Our participants reflected this, with women, Black job seekers, and those without a college degree highly represented among our job seeker participants. Women accounted for 69.5 percent of our participants, men 30.5 percent, and no respondents reported a non-binary gender identity. Participants were majority Black (78.2%), with each other racial identity accounting for less than 10 percent of respondents: Latinx (9.0%), Other (5.1%), White (3.8%), American Indian or Alaska Native (2.6%), Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (1.3%) (Figure 2). No respondents reported Asian identity. While respondents were instructed to “mark all that apply,” no respondents chose more than one racial/ethnic category. Given the under representation of some groups (e.g., Latinx respondents, male respondents) and the nature of qualitative research, findings are not generalizable.



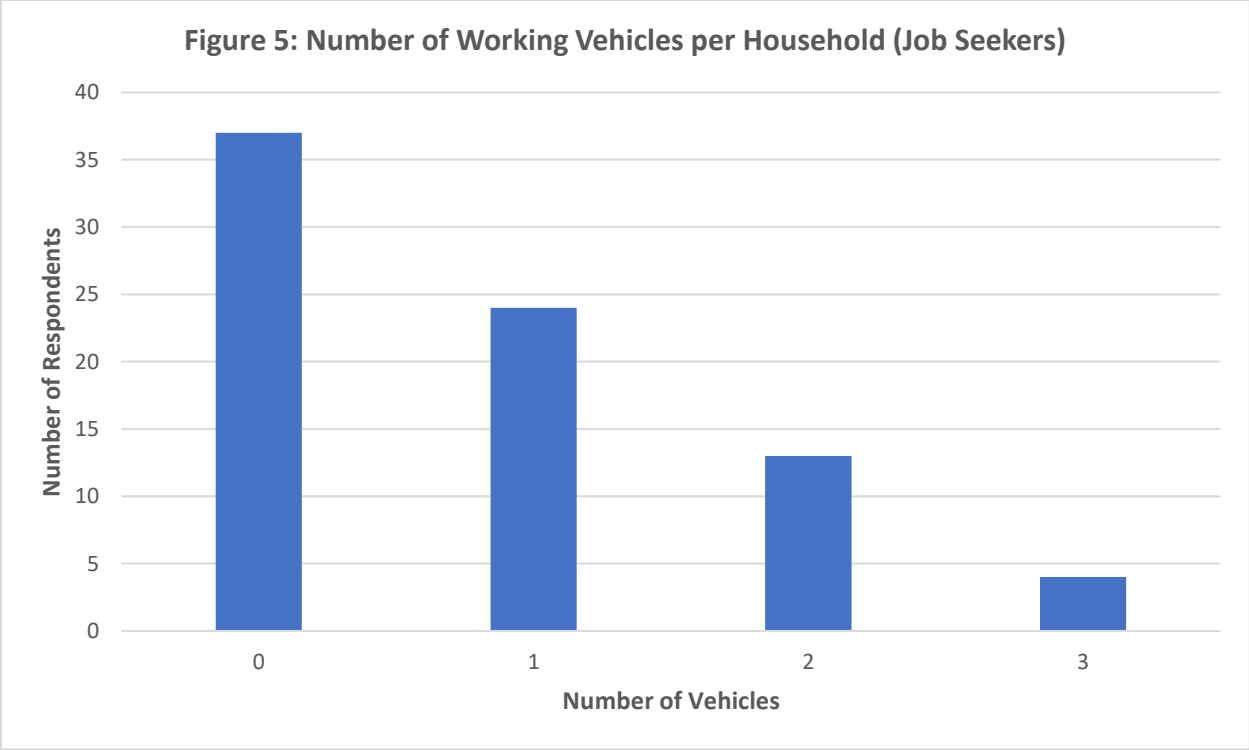
Most respondents had no college education, with 34.7 percent reporting less than a high school degree and 24.0 percent reporting high school as the highest degree completed (Figure 3). Still, 17.3 percent had some college and 9.3 percent each reported a two or four year degree. Four respondents (5.3%) had a graduate degree. In total, 81.0 percent of respondents reported completing less than a four-year degree.



Respondents reported mostly low and moderate incomes (Figure 4). Over 90 percent reported a household income below \$50,000, with a majority (70.9%) of respondents reporting an income below \$30,000.



Most respondents did report ownership of a credit card (84.5%) or smartphone (97.5%). Although almost half of respondents (47.4%) did not have a working vehicle in their household, almost a third (30.8%) had one vehicle, with the remainder reporting more than one working household vehicle (Figure 5).



Job seeker participants came from across the city (see Figure 7), and a few even beyond it. They traveled to the focus group sites using a variety of modes, and six reported using multiple modes (Figure 6). The slight majority (50.6%) used transit, followed by just over a quarter (25.8%) who drove. Next, getting a ride, walking, or taking ride-hail all fell between five and 10 percent, with only 1 participant each reporting biking or other. Most respondents (85.4%) had not experienced a disability that limited taking transit or driving.

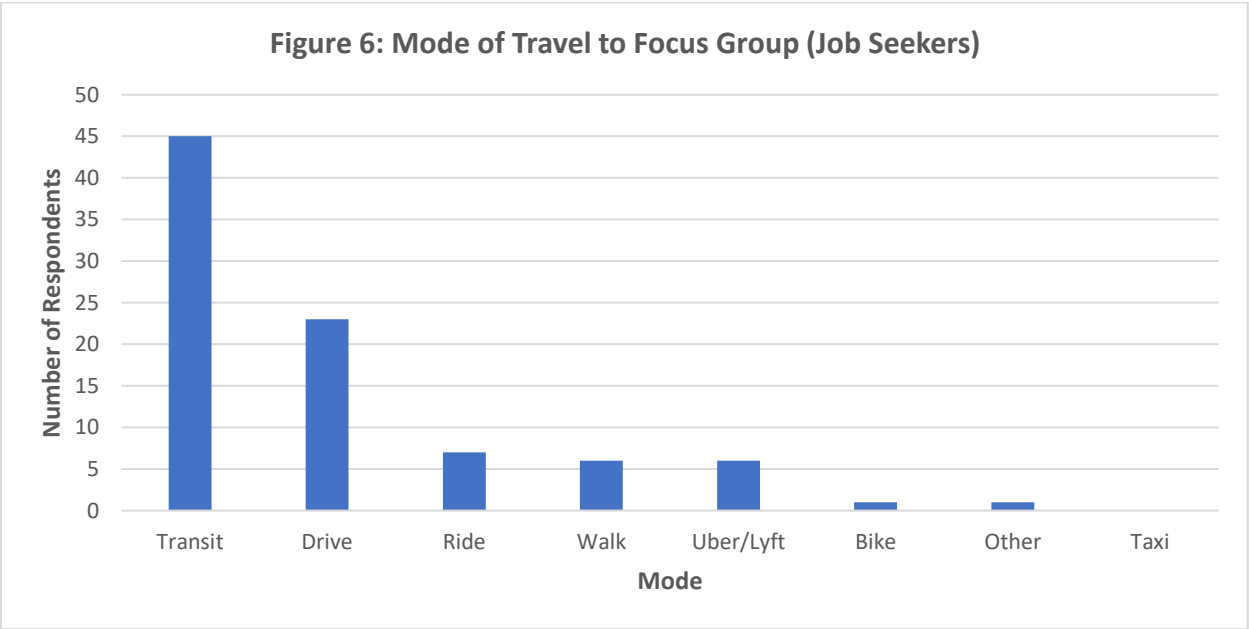
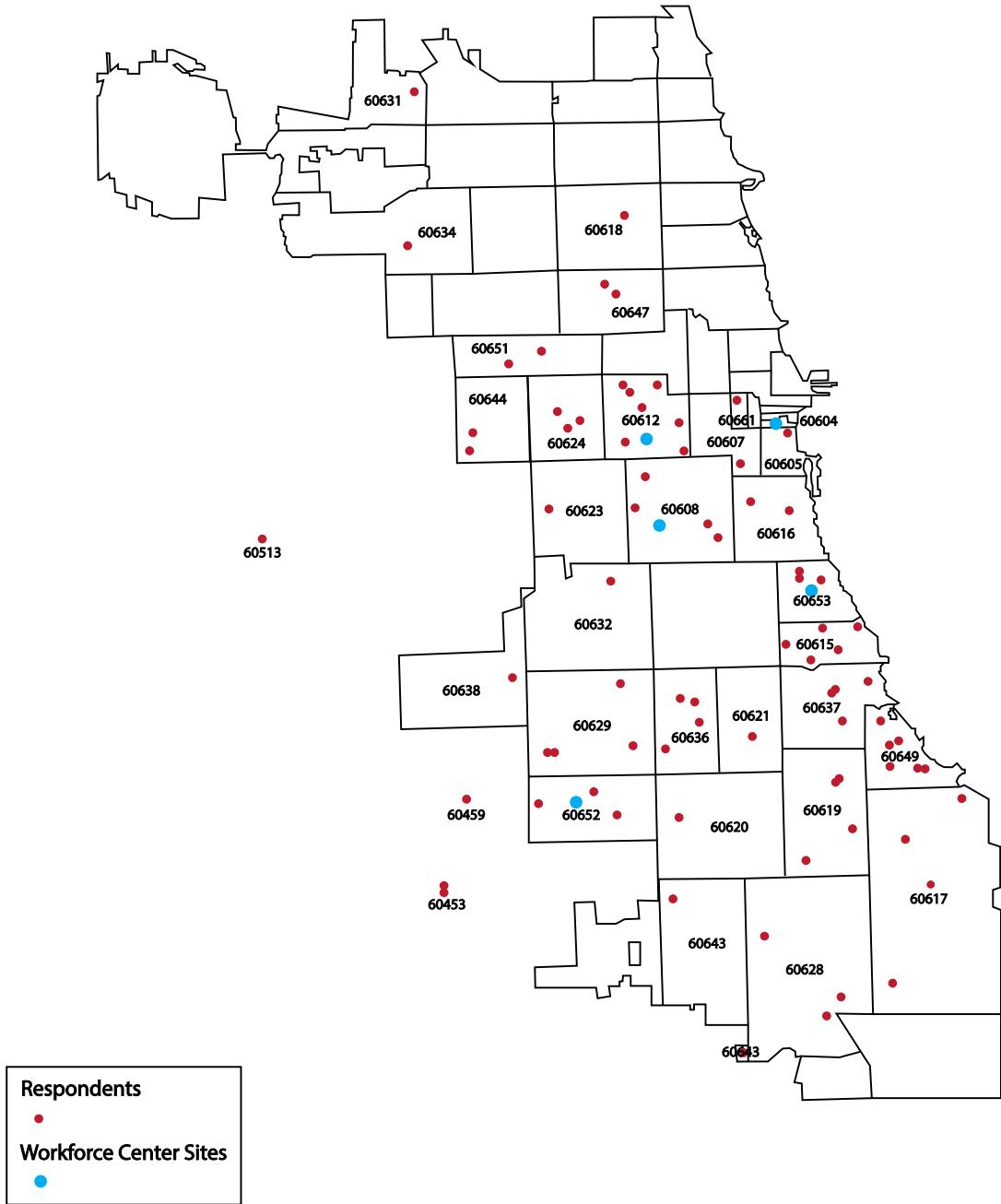


Figure 7: Dot Density Map of Job Seeker Participants with Workforce Center Sites



Zip Code Boundaries Retrieved from City of Chicago Shapefile Database
* Dots represent occurrence in zip codes, not precise locations
Created By Adam Glueckert

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Job Coach Focus Groups and Participants

There were five job coach focus groups (one at each site) also conducted in Summer and Fall 2019. Groups ranged in size from five to 12 participants with an average of 8.4 participants (42 total, although not all participants answered all questions). Because the research focus was not on the demographic characteristics of the job coaches, the survey instrument asked only one individual-related question about how long they have worked as a job coach. Many (29.3%) were relatively new to their positions, having been in them 2.9 years or less. However, more than a quarter (26.8%) had been in their roles for 15 years or more.

Focus Group Findings

This section details the coded themes from the job seeker and job coach focus groups, examining transportation challenges and burdens, security, public transit, active modes, employer and worksite issues, inequities, and solutions.

Transportation Challenges and Burdens

Spatial mismatch (job seekers)

Although the term “spatial mismatch” did not come up in any focus groups, the concept came up in all ten job seeker focus groups. In transportation research and policy circles, spatial mismatch is the distance (physical or travel time) between the concentration of entry-level city workers and suburban job sites. In general, respondents described that certain jobs are inaccessible to them due to the burden of traveling to the suburbs. Respondents shared that manufacturing and other factory jobs are often located far outside of the city, while corporate jobs are often located downtown: “So, the good paying jobs, if you're in the manufacturing and factory work, which is what I do, they're available. You got to have a car. Corporate come on downtown, get you a bus pass, nice office job, you know?” (108).

Respondents described how they calculate the amount of money and time it would take to commute to a new job before even applying: “Well, I noticed if it's somewhere far, I won't even apply to the job” (105). This was frustrating, because in the suburbs, jobs were both more available and paid higher wages: “It might be a good job but the commute might make you not want to take the job, honestly” (103).

Suburban jobs are especially inaccessible to those that rely on public transportation: “So suburbs are an issue, because public transportation is poor” (109). Respondents identified the scheduling and the geography covered by current routes as reasons why suburban public transportation is poor. They generally agreed that suburban jobs pay better, but were costly to get to in terms of time:

The Pace system is great. Like you said, they're on time. They're limited. And if you're putting in, let's say an hour and a half, and that's minimum, of Pace time from home to any job, that's three hours there and back for an eight hour shift. You have to really wonder how much of your day that occupies. (102)

Pace service is limited or nonexistent overnight, on weekends, and on holidays: “I just turned down a job in Woodfield Mall on the 15th because it's at 6 in the morning and I can't get there. There's no way I can

get there” (104). A respondent described that a friend of theirs³ would take a train to the end of the Blue Line and then pay for a cab each Saturday to get to work. Another respondent described how they depended on rides from coworkers to get to and from work when the Pace bus was not in service, which limited their ability to accept overtime work.

Pace service is also limiting in terms of the geography covered by current routes. One respondent described that even if they were able to travel to the suburbs by Metra train, they would still not be able to get to the location where they worked:

It's very difficult, because say you do take a Metra out there, then what do you do once you get off the Metra? There's no bus access or Pace to get to the companies, so it's not like the train station is near where the companies are at, it's off, so you've still got to find another means of transportation to get from point B to point C. (106)

Generally, respondents agreed: “If you want to work in the suburbs, suburbs may pay more, but you basically got to have a car, really, to work in the suburbs...” (109).

Spatial mismatch (job coaches).

Although there were no questions that directly addressed spatial mismatch, the theme came up in all five job coach focus groups. In general, respondents agreed with the comments of one job coach, who stated: “I'm just going to be honest, you gotta get out the South side in order to find work and get work at a decent wage” (201).

Another respondent emphasized that the best paying jobs are not only located outside of the city, but are in areas that are inaccessible by public transportation:

For example, I was just working on one of our systems that we use that has a list of available jobs throughout the Chicago area and what I noticed is some of those particular jobs, the ones that actually pay the most, are the ones that are actually in the North suburbs and the Northwest suburbs. And what's interesting is that some of our customers that we work with don't have transportation or means to get out to where those jobs are. (204)

Respondents discussed that suburban public transportation networks often do not serve the areas where employment opportunities are concentrated, like industrial districts, and that their infrequency and limited hours of service make coordinating transportation with work schedules difficult. In terms of the infrequency and limited hours of service, one respondent shared:

So if you get off at 10 o'clock at night, you may not be able to catch a bus until 11 or... and the companies and Pace have not synchronized their schedules, so your shift might end a half-an-hour after Pace stops, and you just stuck...either you have to wait for another half-an-hour or hour or that could actually be the last bus for the night. So, if you miss it, you'll have to find your own means to get back in the city. (201)

³ This report will use the generic, gender neutral third-person pronoun “they” when referring to particular respondents, in line with American Psychological Association Style guidelines. Direct quotations have not been altered.

Respondents shared that clients are more willing now than in the past to endure long commutes to access jobs in the suburbs. Many suggested that clients are willing to do this because there is simply no other option. A respondent described how unfair it is for companies to be able to lower their operating costs by moving to the suburbs, while shifting the burden of transportation onto their low-income workers:

So if I'm coming out of the center of Chicago, and I need to hit one of the suburbs, transportation only goes so far and then I may end up having to double the cost of travel just to take that job. Like, I'll have to pay all the way out of the city to the suburb and then I have to accumulate another cost for either an increase with purchasing Pace, or paying someone to take me the rest of the distance. Like car pooling or what have you. So, it's unfair, especially since these are the individuals who are making less money. (205)

Respondents also felt that long commutes are just not sustainable in the long-term:

So for people living in our area and the South side, it's a big barrier because if they want access to better jobs, higher wages, that means commuting an hour, an hour-and-half, two hours and I feel like over time that could kind of, you know, after a year or two years of doing that you could kind of get fed up. (201)

Transportation costs versus wages (job coaches)

Although there were no questions that directly addressed transportation costs versus wages, the theme came up in all five job coach focus groups. Transportation costs, which include both money and time, were repeatedly identified as a major transportation barrier and disincentive for clients. In terms of the relationship between transportation costs and wages, respondents agreed with one job coach, who shared: "And if the job is not paying enough, by the time the clients do all this, take a train and a couple buses to get there... You basically working for transportation costs" (202).

Clients spend a large portion of their wages on transportation costs, especially considering other essential expenses like housing, food, childcare, and health care. Respondents estimated that clients making minimum wage spend at least half a week's pay on monthly transportation costs, whether they take public transportation or drive. Reflecting on the difficulty of covering essential expenses on a minimum wage, a respondent stated: "It doesn't add up" (201).

The cost of transit fare and travel time is related to employee retention, as some clients are simply unable to afford the time and expense spent traveling to and from work, especially if the commute is multi-modal. Clients may take a train and bus out to the suburbs and still rely on a ride-hailing service, taxi, or carpool for the last leg of the trip. Respondents felt like the longer a client travels, the higher wage they should expect, but they admitted that this is not always the case. Job coaches can assist clients with transportation costs in the form of a transit fare card or gas gift card up until their first paycheck. But after this transit subsidy, which clients know is temporary, it can be difficult for a client to absorb the transportation cost. A respondent described one client's experience:

Like I had one of my youth, that her childcare went up because she started working so when I stopped helping her, she was like, "Well now I really can't even afford it." So I helped her with a bus pass but then we also discussed budgeting and things like that,

because once they're working it's hard for me to justify why I'm still giving them bus passes. So, it happens, because things change. (203)

Some respondents identified teaching clients budgeting skills as a strategy for making sure that transportation costs are prioritized, and others suggested lowering the cost of public transportation and gas. The job coach survey results show that 70.0 percent of respondents could neither agree nor disagree with the statement: Employers I work with would consider redirecting recruitment and training funds to transportation to reduce turnover. Still, many respondents felt that the best way to alleviate the transportation cost barrier would be to advocate for cost-sharing programs with employers or to raise employee wages.

Childcare tradeoffs (job coaches)

The theme of childcare tradeoffs came up in four job coach focus groups. In general, respondents expressed that clients who are parents and have the responsibility of dropping off and picking up children from day care, school, or other activities experience an additional barrier to finding work. While listing transportation barriers, one respondent noted: "Childcare too because a lot of our customers have little ones they have to do a lot of transportation, transferring and dropping the child off and then getting to their destination and getting back" (204).

Respondents recognized that clients with children are less willing to commute a great distance to work because of childcare responsibilities and the desire to be close to day care or school in case of an emergency: "They're only willing to go so far from their homes, or from the babysitting, or whatever because they have to get to pick up their children at a certain time" (202). They mentioned that many childcare centers strictly enforce pick up times, assigning steep fines or leaving children at a police station to wait to be picked up. This prevents parents from looking for work far away because public transportation can be unreliable. Even if parents are able to pick up their children on time, the infrequency of public transportation is an additional challenge, especially in the evening, when security is a greater concern: "And if this bus is running every half an hour, then you're looking at them standing there with their kids for a certain amount of time" (202).

One participant also shared that for clients with childcare responsibilities, active transportation modes are less feasible:

Typically, bikers are the ones that will bike to work...especially if I'm a single parent with children, I don't have time for that. I need to get there and, I need to condense my time away from home as much as possible. (205)

Transportation burdens (job seekers)

Because the focus group instrument asked several questions related to themes of transportation burdens,⁴ this theme came up in all ten job seeker focus groups. The job seeker survey also asked about transportation burdens. Asked if transportation challenges made them miss out on job opportunities, 73.4 percent of respondents answered yes, and asked if transportation is a barrier to keeping a job, 73.8 percent of respondents answered yes.

⁴ Questions consisted of the following: What challenges did you face getting here or will you face getting home? What challenges do you face getting to interviews? What challenges did you face getting to work?

Respondents shared that the amount of time and money it takes to travel to some jobs makes it feel like “...you’re basically just working for free, kind of” (106). To determine whether a job is worth applying for, respondents calculate the amount of time and money it would take to commute, as compared to the wage:

And too, you have to think about how much money you gonna spend on transportation versus the amount you get paid a hour. If it’s not more, and it’s less, then it’s no point in taking that job. You paying 20, 40 dollars a day sometimes because you might have to take a cab. You might have to take the train. Now, those train tickets are expensive, you know, so why would you take a job if the wages are too low? (104)

This limits the number of jobs that respondents have access to, even if they are qualified to fill them: “We have to miss out on these opportunities because of transportation” (107).

Respondents reported having to budget extra time to ensure that they arrive to work, or other destinations, on time: “And I came to leave super early to make sure that I was here on time because I don't like being late” (102). This was especially true for those who rely on public transportation: “So you have to figure it out, sometimes with public transportation, like if you start at 9, you have to leave your house at 7 depending where you live because the bus route, the train route, the traffic” (106).

Respondents came to expect these delays and adapted their schedule accordingly. A respondent shared:

But as far as time issues, I take CTA transit all the time and if I have to be there earlier and wait an hour, hour and a half, early before I check in, that’s what I do. You know, I just have to adjust my schedule because it is public transportation and there’s no telling what the issue might be that day. (104)

One respondent pointed out that the time spent commuting is lost valuable personal time: “It's time that you will never get back. It's personal time, and it's time invested monetarily. You sacrifice that time to get from one place to another because it's not part of your work day. You're not making money while you're commuting” (109). Another respondent described that the transportation burden becomes worse as workers age and have family and other responsibilities:

When I was younger, I used to work up north. You were spending three hours, three or four hours per day going and coming. But I was young, I was a kid, you know what I'm saying? It didn't bother me too much. I didn't have a family and so forth. Family, you spend that kind of time, that changes the whole ball game, you know: pick your kids up after sports, wonder who's going to have dinner ready, what things you are going to be doing. (109)

The transportation burdens are different for those who drive and those who use public transportation. For drivers, the most common burdens include the costs of parking, gas, city stickers, maintenance, insurance, potholes, and traffic. Respondents who drive mentioned that they would rather take public transportation to an interview downtown to avoid paying the high price of parking, even when driving might be faster. Several respondents mentioned that the price of gas or of a repair service, especially as a result of hitting a pothole, could prevent them from using their car for a period of time.

Traffic was also reported as a transportation burden:

Sometimes it's not even worth it when you have a car to drive because the time it takes to get there, like if I'm going to Downers Grove or something in traffic and I don't get off until 5 and then sometimes because of traffic you don't get home until 7 or 8, and it's like your whole day. You have children and stuff, sometimes it's not even worth it. (106)

One respondent reported physical symptoms from sitting in their car in traffic on their long commute:

My knee, I had a basketball injury, so sometimes I would have to switch legs driving and pull over and get up and stand up and move around because of sitting in that position for so long. My leg would start cramping, I mean it would be all kind of issues going on. (108)

For respondents that rely on public transportation, the most common burdens include the cost and the total amount of time it takes to travel to a destination. One respondent felt that the cost of public transportation, in combination with other essential expenses, is unaffordable:

Like she said, I remember at one point in time a 30-day bus pass was 50 dollars, now I'm paying 105 dollars just to get- yeah I get unlimited rides for a month, but, it's like, they got to think, people got other bills. People got cell phone bills, you know what I'm saying, rent, all this like- it's just, it's to the point where like Chicago not livable. (103)

Another respondent explained that because they had to make sure to catch the last bus for the evening, their mode of transportation cost them overtime opportunities:

I couldn't do overtime. I had to leave at 11:00 and everybody else was there until 12:30, 1:00 getting overtime. But since transportation, the times with the 54B and they stopped running at a certain time, so I just had to get off at 11:00, and it really hindered me from making the money that I could have been making. (105)

Respondents felt that it took significantly longer to travel by public transportation than to drive: "I can drive and get here in 10 minutes, or I can take public transportation and get here in an hour" (109). The high volume of users at certain times of the day can prevent people from even boarding certain buses and trains, making wait times longer. For those that use Pace or Metra, where the service is less frequent, this can result in users crowding in, which makes the ride uncomfortable: "Sometimes, you're pushing each other to fit in there because if I don't get this train then I've got to wait an hour for the next one" (106). Wait times can be especially long at night: "And then like she was saying, N5 you waiting 45, 50 minutes. I used to work for UPS at one point in time so I'm getting off at 3:00, 4:00 in the morning. Red line alone taking 25 minutes" (103). Construction can also cause significant and unexpected delays or reroutes.

Respondents described the lack of control they feel on public transportation, such as when a fight breaks out, the bus gets into an accident, or there is a medical emergency, and the driver stops to report the incident. One respondent felt it wasn't worth keeping a job after their car broke down because of how difficult their commute became: "Yes, I threw in the towel because of the long hours I had to put in after my car broke down. And that's just transportation, it was like four extra hours a day worth of transportation" (104).

Explaining the challenges of riding public transportation to employers, who often drive cars, was another source of frustration: “Usually, I’ll tell them, ‘I got up at this time, I’ve been on the train or on the bus, but this is what happened.’ It’s crazy because these are people that you’re explaining to that drive cars, they don’t take the [public] transportation” (107). Ultimately, respondents felt that their transportation burdens would be alleviated if they had job training and employment opportunities in their own neighborhoods.

Safety and Security

Security from violence (job seeker)

The theme of security from violence came up in all ten job seeker focus groups. Respondents primarily discussed security concerns related to public transportation and walking.

In terms of public transportation, most respondents shared that they had either witnessed criminal activity when using public transportation or had heard about it through other sources. One respondent reported seeing a fight on their bus: “Like I said I was on the bus and there was a fight that broke out, I was like oh lord, just looking back. Just get to my stop please” (106). Another respondent had been hearing more frequent reports of robberies: “You’ve heard a lot about, recently, purse snatchings and phone snatchings on the train” (106). Respondents had also observed situations where a crime was committed and the bus driver did not stop to report it.

Respondents also witnessed or heard about situations involving violent crime on public transportation: “Yeah, my friend’s sister was the girl that got stabbed on the train by a crazy guy on the Red Line, so yeah” (106). A respondent purchased a car after witnessing multiple shootings: “And I couldn’t afford a truck, but the past two years I had to divvy up because I’ve seen shootings on the transportation system. I just had to go ahead and bite the bullet and take care of that, for my safety reasons” (105). Another respondent described witnessing a disturbing situation on public transportation at night that led them to quit their job:

It could really affect you mentally, at night. I saw somebody get their ear bit off on the bus. I had never seen, you know what I’m saying, it was devastating. So I quit that job because I was afraid. It was just some regular person sitting down, some guy got on the bus started hollering at the person and next thing he sat by him and bit his ear off. (104)

Some respondents had also personally been the victim of a crime on public transportation. One participant shared an experience of being robbed, after which they decided to stop riding the train:

So taking public transportation, I’ve taken a number of types of transportation. The Metra, the bus. And years ago, I took the Red Line and things of that nature, which I did not like at all. So I would take the bus instead because I got robbed. A guy snatched from my neck. So I never took that again. And the only time I will take the CTA train is if I’m going to the airport. (102)

Respondents reported feeling safer using Metra or Pace than using CTA: “And it’s like you said, Metra and Pace, they cool, you not- I could be able to take a nap and be fine. I couldn’t do that on CTA, I go to sleep my whole wallet gone, my whole book bag gone” (103).

Personal security becomes a greater concern when using public transportation after dark: “And at night, it’s scary. It really is, yeah it’s really really scary at night.” (104). Another respondent shared:

I worked at like a job. I had to be there at 4:00 A.M. in the morning. At first I was taking the train there, but I wasn't comfortable with that. And I wound up having to carpool with someone that lived in the area. I did that for the remainder of the time that I was there. (102)

One respondent arranges rides from family members to avoid taking the bus at night:

My brother or my mama or my sister or somebody come pick me up. I don’t gotta catch the bus at night time. The way my neighborhood set up, you don’t want to catch the bus at night time. I just get a way to work and then I get somebody to pick me up before I get off work. (107)

Not only the experience of riding buses and trains, but the experience of walking to and waiting for public transportation after dark can make respondents vulnerable to harassment:

The environment where you stand greatly affects you catching the bus or the train on time. I have had to rearrange my route everyday because people are following me from my house to the bus. Recently, there was this lady, I don’t know what she was doing, but she was off the drugs and she popped out the alley – I have to get to work at 5 in the morning every day – so I’m waiting at the bus, I’m tired. I didn’t even see her and she came up and she told me, “You want to fight me?” I’m like, “What? No thank you, ma’am.” She came back, she was like, “You calling me stupid?” I had to call the cops and I was late for work. (107)

Walking was not seen as an option for respondents who worked at night: “I’m not gonna walk because it’s like 4 in the morning and it’s still dark. I work 6 to 2:30, so who’s gonna walk from here to United Center right now when nobody’s out?” (107). Another respondent described that they rely on ride-hailing services once their local bus stops for the evening or on weekends, instead of walking a few blocks to another bus, because they do not feel comfortable walking through their neighborhood:

And, you know, it's just, Englewood's one of the worst neighborhoods in the country, so it's every other block you got people standing outside and you know just- I don't want to say crime in general, but there's a lot of crime. And, like, why put yourself in a situation that can become something more. You wouldn't want to put yourself in that. So coming down Damen would actually be a much better route. But, like she said, if I'm trying to come home at 6:00 in the evening it's a good chance I'm not going to be able to go that way. Or if I'm trying to come anywhere on the weekend. (103)

Respondents also considered the steps they take to protect themselves when commuting to work. Some respondents mentioned that they would only take interviews or accept positions in areas that they knew they were comfortable traveling to: “So I made it very plain that if I can't have a job downtown, I would not work. Or if it's at a hospital that I know about or a company in an area that I am comfortable with going to. But otherwise, I won't take the interview” (102). Another respondent talked about how they had recently purchased a gun for personal security and expressed how disappointed they were to learn that they could not carry it with them on public transportation.

Safety and Security (job coaches)

Although there were no questions that directly addressed safety, the theme came up in all five job coach focus groups. In general, respondents discussed the risk of crashes and threats of violence that clients face when biking and using public transportation.

One respondent shared what clients say about the dangers of biking: “They say it's dangerous. There's from the standpoint of the neighborhood you're in, the roads you are on, people opening their doors, without looking, it's just not safe for our clients to get on bikes” (205). Another respondent described the experience of a client who had been hit by a car several times despite being an experienced rider and following traffic laws.

Most comments about security had to do with threats of violence on public transportation. Respondents reported witnessing drug use, domestic violence, robberies, and suicide on buses and trains, which can have an impact on the mental health of clients: “It's just, you got mental health involved in this, and then you've got people that actually see stuff like that and don't want to take public transportation anymore. But what can you do? That's what you have to do if that's your means of transportation” (203). And besides just witnessing violence, respondents described situations where clients had been robbed, and one respondent shared: “Many of someone being on the train and there's this man that regularly rides CTA and gropes women” (201). Another respondent shared: “My client was caught in a gang, I guess, shooting... And as soon as she got off the bus, and she just couldn't do it no more. She couldn't work” (201).

Security concerns were particularly salient for female clients. A respondent mentioned: “We've had some female clients that just say they don't want to take public transportation because they don't feel it's safe” (205). One client decided to purchase a car because they did not feel safe walking to the public transportation options in their neighborhood:

Where she lives, it is... you know, at night it is really uncomfortable to try to be walking to the train, to the bus, because the area that she lives may be considered as not a great area. And so therefore, that's why she's tried to get some transportation that would be probably more reliable for her to get from point A to point B. (202)

Some clients set limits on the hours they are willing to use public transportation to avoid being out past dark, foregoing the opportunity of working second or third shifts. Job coaches think about these issues when matching clients with jobs:

The same issues they just spoke of, the dangers of it. Public transportation is far from safe, so those are the type of things I have to consider, how far am I sending them, what the neighborhood looks like, what their schedule's going to be like... The last thing I want to do is set them up for a second shift in the middle of a neighborhood where they definitely shouldn't be after hours or, you know. (203)

To cope with the dangers that clients face on public transportation, some depend on ride-hail services to get to work or job training safely:

One customer told me was that they couldn't be on the bus because they had to cross gang territory, an enemy territory, so for example, from where they live to the school

they were attending, they were in a CDL school, that bus route traveled along gang routes. So he couldn't go on that bus, he had to take Uber to get to school. (201)

Public Transit Service

Frequency (job seekers)

The theme of transit frequency came up in nine of ten job seeker focus groups. Respondents voiced a desire for more frequent CTA bus service: “I feel like CTA should increase services, just because it's like, you know, coming from my neighborhood again, it's like I gotta wait 15 minutes for a bus. 15, 20 minutes, just increase services” (103). Another participant expressed a desired improvement for bus service and compared CTA, which operates in the city of Chicago, to Pace, which operates in the suburbs: “I was gonna say more frequency in the buses. The schedule is every 10 minutes, but they come every 30 to 45 minutes. It's like waiting on the Pace bus” (104). Indeed, several focus group discussions identified the infrequency of Pace buses and/or desired increases in Pace service. One explained how the infrequency of Pace service intersects with workplace issues:

I feel like both Pace and Metra both are really good services. But they should increase the service. Metra runs pretty good, but at a certain time that stops. But Pace, you got to wait an hour, hour and a half, two hours for a bus. So I feel like if they increased it to cater for people to go out to those places they need to go, it would be a lot easier, because it's so hard. If you- suppose you're running 5 minutes late for work. That 5 minutes just cost me- now I got to wait 2 hours for the next bus. I might not have money to catch an Uber that day. Now I'm- I could be on a final warning because I'm 5 minutes behind, and it might not even be my fault. It might be one of those unforeseen things on CTA, but now because I'm 5 minutes behind, I missed the bus I need, now I got to wait an hour and a half, an hour and 45 minutes for the next bus. I might as well just turn around and go home, I don't have a job anymore. (103)

One respondent simply explained: “they don't have enough Pace buses in the suburbs” (101). Another contrasted suburban service and scheduling adaptations, “Yeah, it's slower. You have to really get on your schedule then because the bus then it runs every hour or every 45 minutes, not like in Chicago every 15 minutes” (110).

Reliability (job seekers)

Reliability, specifically of mass transit, was a substantial topic of conversation, and the coded theme appeared in eight of ten job seeker focus groups. While many respondents spoke of expecting waits and unreliability, there was a variety of perspectives and different experiences across different modes or providers of mass transit. One respondent said, “I think with CTA transportation you're always gonna have to get up or be scheduled a whole hour or two early because you never know what can happen” (107). Another observed, “You can't rely on it to make it to places on time using the CTA, like public transportation, you can't really rely on them because there ain't no telling what's going on any given day” (105).

Focus group respondents also noted frustrations that could occur with infrequency or delays—crowded buses upon arrival. A participant observed: “...you'll be waiting damn near 20 minutes for the bus and when it finally comes it's all packed” (101). Respondents also noted inconsistent waits and bunching, “King Drive bus, for instance, 3 come at a time. I know one is late, one is early, and I don't know what

the other one – but that infringes on getting to where you need to be, because if you miss those three clumped buses, you gonna wait an hour to 45 minutes for another bus” (104).

On the other hand, one respondent had a more positive assessment: “I’ve been taking the train and the bus all my life. So I mean, it’s reliable. It’ll get me there, but they just need to update a lot of stuff so it can be more helpful” (107). Another expressed satisfaction with an express service: “I stay by a really good bus. I live by the J14. So, this bus runs from Jeffrey and it goes express straight downtown. So it’s like it be right on the money, I love it” (103).

While one respondent specifically discussed problems with the Blue Line, others suggested that train service was more reliable than bus service: “The train is okay usually, the bus is just unpredictable, it’s all over the place” (108) and went on to discuss different access to delay information across the two modes. Another respondent explained, “I stay on the Southeast side of Chicago, so I’m primarily taking the bus. And it’s definitely less reliable than the train. And there is not really any signage or anything that shows you” (102). Given that the focus groups were all located in the City of Chicago, it is not surprising that the CTA received more attention than Pace and Metra. However, respondents brought up Pace, which only operates buses, as unreliable (109), while Metra’s reliability came up more favorably (109).

Respondents discussed information—or a lack thereof—about delays repeatedly. Some expressed frustration about not having accurate information: “So supposedly Google Maps syncs the CTA app and syncs to CTA buses. You can track where they are. But it’s not accurate” (102). In that same focus group (102), a desire for push notifications and a comparison with New York also came up:

New York is also a bigger city, so their transit systems are similar. But you would want to, I don’t know, inform your populous. I just think in this day and age when it’s so easy to do push notifications and give that information, I don’t understand why the system isn’t utilizing it. I think that’s just how my brain works, where if you have this ability to do this, why aren’t you doing it? (102)

Another discussed frustration with an application:

But one time it gets even worse, because this app that my daughter has showed me about... That you could see what time the bus supposed to be there. You pull that up and you thinking you there on time baby, and sometime them times is not really accurate. (101)

Another participant had better—albeit not perfect—experiences with arrival information and delay information:

Basically if they are delayed or late, they let you know or what have you. But they are not perfect. But I don’t have to necessarily on a regular basis go to my phone to check to see what the times are because the normal booklets that I would get gives me pretty much the timing and it’s usually pretty accurate. (102)

Respondents identified a variety of causes for or manifestation of delays. One respondent noted the frustration of delayed buses and bunching: “I feel like when the buses come super duper late, and then

once they finally get here it be like three buses come at once, that's so annoying" (107). Periodic events intersected with information—or lack there of—on service delays:

It would be helpful, especially in the summertime, because there are so many events like Taste of Chicago, Lollapalooza, I keep going on and on. But to, like she said, either have alerts about those events as they are approaching or just have some type of list that we can refer to, especially if you're taking the bus...Because those delays are like the longest delays, like trying to get off of like Lake Shore Drive to Michigan Avenue, and then inching. And you don't know when you are going to get off the bus. So you can miss like a whole interview or half a day of work trying to go from point A to point B. (102)

Some respondents noted a need for more state of good repair investment, as equipment failure could cause delays. This respondent explained:

Another thing they need to do is, they need to start investing money back into their equipment. The buses and trains- they are going to stay broken, and I don't need to take the bus or train- sitting on the shoulder, broke down. People just standing on the sidewalk waiting on another bus to come, a shuttle bus. But they need to maintain their equipment and maybe that will cut down on the delays. (101)

Delays also intersect with issues of community and on-transit personal danger. Riders could face delay if a bus does not make a stop due to security concerns, according to one respondent: "Some drivers choose not to stop because of the location and that makes people get late to job" (101). Multiple respondents suggested fights or passenger altercations could cause delays:

Sometimes when you plan ahead you can also come to an obstacle. Bus got in an accident, bus can break down. Or someone started a fight on the bus. Yeah, we can plan but sometimes we plan we can fail in planning because we don't know what's going to happen. Certain things be out of your control. (103)

Other respondents noted that construction, medical emergencies, strollers, and wheelchairs could cause delays.

While many respondents did not mention shifting modes, one mentioned preferring a car over the CTA because of mass transit reliability issues: "So I prefer a car over the CTA because it's more reliable. You don't have to depend on, am I going to be late for work? Or if the train is five or 10 minutes late or none of that. So I prefer the car" (102). Others mentioned sometimes using ride-hail. One noted: "I don't really get on the bus, CTA, anymore, not like that. I use Uber more" (105). Another used ride-hail to adapt to a late arrival rather than as a consistent mode choice: "Like there have been times in winter where I would have to pay 50 dollars for an Uber to get to work because I had been standing there for 20 minutes and nothing is happening" (102).

[System coordination \(job seekers\)](#)

The system coordination theme came up in seven of the ten job seeker focus groups. Respondents generally felt that the transportation system in Chicago and the surrounding suburbs, which includes different modes and different agencies, could be difficult to navigate:

Chicago is so- we do have one of the best public transportation systems. But it seems like it's starting to be too much almost. Like maybe if they simplified it or did something, because it's like we got the L, we got the train... we got Metra, we got Amtrak, we got the bike lane, people driving, people riding bikes, we got people rolling blading, now we got the Divvy bikes, scooters. So it's always busy it's always just a lot going on. (103)

One of the system coordination challenges that respondents identified was transferring between CTA, Pace, and Metra:

So it's like, it's all kind of a cohesive unit but it seems like to me that Pace and CTA doesn't cooperate with each other. It's never a smooth transition. There's never a smooth transition from the CTA to the Pace bus. You'll get off the CTA bus and you've got to wait an hour and a half for the next Pace. You see what I'm saying? So it's really difficult to move about once you get to certain parts of the city. (103)

Sometimes, respondents found there was actually no route available to get to a certain destination:

It's very difficult, because say you do take a Metra out there, then what do you do once you get off the Metra? There's no bus access or Pace to get to the companies, so it's not like the train station is near where the companies are at, it's off, so you've still got to find another means of transportation to get from point B to point C. (106)

A common frustration was the limited hours of service of Pace and Metra, which made connecting with CTA routes difficult:

An all-night kind of thing, like more connections with the suburbs and the city, where – because once you get so far, it's like you in never-never land. So, if they had something with the city and the suburbs, or another city that's linking with Chicago, that way there's always transportation all day. (107)

Respondents suggested that employers could provide shuttles from nearby transit hubs, or work with transportation agencies to adjust routes and schedules to accommodate the needs of their employees. They also felt that buses that stop at train stations should wait longer for passengers to leave the train and board the bus before taking off, considering it could be the only service for an hour or more.

Respondents also discussed the different payment methods and prices for CTA, Pace, and Metra, which can make using these different services confusing: “All three of them have got different pay fares and transfers you've got to have. If they could all combine you the same transfer then it'd make it easier on everybody” (110).

Respondents called for more integration between the transportation systems that serve the city and the suburbs, to make it easier to navigate across these boundaries: “My thing is just, basically, if the city, with the suburbs, can link together and do something far as the transportation once you get past the city, where the jobs are in the suburbs, maybe that would be a good thing to do” (107). Respondents also described the need for one digital platform that would give users all their transportation options, rather than having to use different applications and websites. One respondent felt doubtful that a platform like this could be developed at all, given that transportation agencies are in competition with each other and it might take business away from one operator in favor of another.

Accessibility for caregivers and those with disabilities (job seekers)

The job seeker survey contained one question related to accessibility for people with disabilities.⁵ The majority (85.4%) of respondents reported that they had not experienced a disability that limited their ability to take transit or drive to work, but 14.6 percent responded yes to one or both modes. The theme of universal accessibility came up in three of ten job seeker focus groups.

Several respondents discussed the issue of broken elevators at CTA L stops: “I’m in a good transportation space except for my elevator. Half the Green Line is not working. I guess they fixing it but it’s been out for a while” (109). This presents a challenge for seniors, for caregivers with children in strollers, and for users with wheelchairs. A parent shared:

And to make sure they keep these elevators because the elevator by my house has been down since April and I have to carry, especially if my daughter’s father is not around, I have to carry my baby and her car seat and her stroller up what, 30 some stairs, 40 stairs. I was trying but they said it wasn’t going to be fixed until October. October? (107)

Even when the elevators are working, they can be unpleasant or unsafe to use: “And put security guards on the train stations because the people in the elevators, they be like doing drugs, urinating. It’s hard for people to even use the elevators because of the stuff that be inside of it” (107). Another respondent shared that due to the broken elevator at their stop, they had to budget extra time in their commute and pace themselves as they climbed the stairs:

Well, for me, my elevator's out, so that means I have to leave a little earlier. I know it's going to take me a minute to go up these stairs. I may rest. I may do two flights and then stop for a minute. You just have to adjust. You just leave early. (109)

Because some elevators do not open directly at the platform level, users might have to walk up or down ramps to access the train. The steep grade of the ramps makes some riders uneasy:

I don't like walking up and down the ramps either, though. I can walk down but walking up is a problem. When I was younger, I could run down the ramps and catch the train. Now I take my time because I'm scared I'm going to trip and fall going down the ramps. (109)

Respondents also discussed the accessibility challenges they encounter when boarding the bus:

They need to update the curbs at the bus stops, because they really be off the bus, like me, I gotta get my baby on the bus and he in a stroller. When we get on the bus it’s kind of hard because there be a gap in between the sidewalk and the bus. Sometimes they get right down there, sometimes they don’t. They need to go down for people who need it, period. (107)

One respondent explained that their commute requires traveling by bus and then by train, but the side of the street that the bus drops them off on requires them to choose between climbing the nearby stairs or walking a far distance to the elevator or escalator to access the train platform:

⁵ “Have you experienced a disability that limited your ability to take transit or drive to work?”

Sometimes the bus will take you... I'm just throwing something out there... the Red Line. Its stairs on this side so that's where the bus lets you off. On the other side, you have to walk around to take the elevator or the escalator. Now, if you're disabled, you standing there: do I take the stairs, or walk two blocks? That's a problem. (109)

Insufficient accessible seating on buses can cause tension between riders who require more space for different reasons:

Last year, I had an incident, it was about 10:00 in the morning and there were about 3 or 4 senior citizens on and the bus driver said "give up those seats" and we looked at each other and we dug in. So, the lady with the stroller, she paused to see if we were gonna give our seat up, we didn't. She did the baby like that, scooped him up, hit a button, the stroller collapsed, and she put it up because, you know, we weren't going to move. The bus driver was going to curb the bus until we got up. I wrote CTA a letter and they wrote me back apologizing that the bus driver acted in this way because having a baby is not a disability. It really isn't. (104)

Negative perceptions of transit (job coaches)

Perhaps because the focus group instrument had two questions about public transportation,⁶ the theme of negative perceptions of transit came up in all five job coach focus groups. Job coach survey results show that 55.0 percent of respondents agree or strongly agree with the following statement: I seek out employers/job placement sites that are on public transit. Survey results also show that 78.1 percent of job coaches estimate that at least half of their clients rely on public transit. In general, respondents described several aspects of public transportation that make it an unattractive option for clients to travel to work, including overcrowding, the condition of buses and trains, customer service, reliability, cost, and safety.

Overcrowding can prevent clients from boarding their scheduled bus or train, potentially making them late for work. It can also simply make the commute uncomfortable: "I'm going to have to be packed as a sardine and therefore, I don't want to go to that job" (202). Respondents commented on the poor condition of buses and trains, including a lack of air conditioning in the summer, the smell of urine, the sight of litter, and the threat of bed bugs from the cloth seats. Hostile interactions with customer service agents or with drivers also came up as a factor that discourages clients from using public transportation. Respondents discussed how drivers may be unable or unwilling to help clients navigate new areas due to their lack of knowledge or their refusal to engage with riders. Commenting on the overall experience of using public transportation, one participant stated: "I think people are just sick and tired of being treated like garbage in the city. We take public transportation but that doesn't mean we're sub-human. We deserve nice things too" (205).

Respondents shared their clients' frustration at dealing with unexpected delays on public transportation due to occurrences like accidents, weather, or fights that can make a client late for work no matter how much they had prepared themselves and planned ahead:

⁶ Questions consisted of the following: What do clients say about riding public transit, like the CTA and Pace, to work? What barriers do they mention about using public transit?

And a lot of complaints about just not being able to rely on the scheduling... It's really big, especially when you know you have to be at work at a certain time and you try to adjust your schedule to do that and then you know, then the drivers, the buses aren't on time or the trains aren't on time and eventually your boss doesn't want to hear that excuse anymore. (205)

One respondent explained that the job security of a client who commutes by public transportation is dependent on the reliability and consistency of the buses and trains on their route:

There's also just the inconsistency, sometimes, everybody knows this, sometimes there's no bus for half an hour to an hour and then there's three buses in a row or there's three trains that go right past you and they're all so packed that you can't get on even if you planned and you were there on time. Most jobs have a three strikes type rule and you won't be able to continue after that point if your route is not consistent. (205)

Respondents discussed that the electronic fare media card payment system is designed to serve users with debit or credit cards. They noted that clients, who do not have debit or credit cards, are unable to load fare cards in advance, and instead pay with cash at the time of boarding, are unable to access the discounted transfer fares that fare card users can. These clients, then, pay twice as much for a commute that requires one transfer and three times as much for a commute that requires two transfers than fare card users. Participants also mentioned the confusion that clients feel transferring between CTA, Pace, and Metra, due to the different fees:

I think it's a little ridiculous that we have Metra, Pace and CTA, that could easily be one department or one organization running all of the public transportation options and it could be connected because the fees are different going from one to another is different, like that's ridiculous. That's complete just duplication of services. (205)

One participant suggested that the negative perception of public transportation may be unwarranted. They felt that public transportation agencies should do more outreach: "It's just about them reaching out and letting the general public know that public transportation is good. It shouldn't always have the negative connotation to it" (201). Another participant described the need to change the perception of public transportation among employers, so that they don't discriminate against potential employees who rely on public transportation:

I think if we could look at the way we look at people who ride public transportation on a daily basis, you know, everyone looks down on them like they're too poor to afford their own cars so therefore we can treat them as sub-human. And I don't think that's the case. If we could just change the face of the passenger somehow. (205)

Active Modes

Perception of biking and walking (job seekers)

Because the focus group instrument had a question about biking and walking,⁷ there was a discussion about these active transportation modes in every focus group. Participants rarely brought up active

⁷ "What would make biking or walking better as a way to find or keep a job?"

modes other than in response to the specific prompt, and very few walked (6.7%) or biked (1.1%) to the focus group sites. While respondents specified some improvements possible for each mode, the tone of the conversation was that these were not generally viable modes for improving job access, even as some respondents pointed to the health benefits of active transportation.

Respondents voiced concerns about the danger associated with walking and biking, although they emphasized different types of danger associated with each mode. For bicycling, participants repeatedly noted traffic danger and a lack of infrastructure, for example:

Even with the high traffic areas with people and you're on a bike and you're trying to go across that bridge on Michigan Avenue going over, it's not safe. Then you're trying to go out to the lanes and there's no bike lane right there, so it makes it dangerous for you then. (106)

Danger from violence or crime came up frequently related to walking, with a desire for more safety. One respondent explained:

I think this is simple, and it has nothing to do with transportation at all. Certain areas in Chicago is like, it wouldn't be a good idea to just walk through, regardless of whether you're male or female, old or younger, it's just like- certain areas are high crime areas. And like I said earlier, why put yourself in the situation to take a chance if you can prevent it...But between you waiting on that bus, you actually getting on that bus, how much stuff you may have come across. It would be smart to just walk down to the next bus stop. But if you on 79th and Cottage Grove, there's really no good bus stop for you to walk to unless you're walking down back up the 87th or you're walking- even walking there you're going to- there's no way of getting around that. Unless you can change the area because it really has nothing to do with the transportation. It's just, you wouldn't feel too comfortable walking around certain areas. (103).

Respondents noted additional barriers to each mode as well. The participants suggested walking and biking were not always feasible because of distance and identified the need for more businesses and jobs located in their communities within walking distance. One respondent explained: "To walk, it'd have to be a couple of blocks as far as working. If I worked a couple of blocks from where I lived, yeah, I would walk" (109). Another desired economic activity in the city when answering the question on biking and walking: "If there were better businesses back in the city like we used to have more businesses in the city. Give companies more incentive to move back into the city, and then offer bikes, scooters, and transportation would be very, very helpful for the economy, for the environment, and for the individual families" (105). One additional challenge was that active modes could result in arriving disheveled or sweaty to interviews or jobs. Sidewalk conditions and the availability of bike lanes were also insufficient for these modes.

Respondents mentioned that the poor condition of sidewalks are another universal accessibility concern: "Also with the sidewalks too, because I be trippin'. I don't fall, but I be trippin'" (107). In the winter, respondents described that they are sometimes forced to walk in the street because the sidewalks are not cleared of snow and ice, presenting a clear barrier for respondents with limited mobility.

Lack of consideration for biking and walking (job coaches)

Because the focus group instrument had two questions about active transportation,⁸ the theme of lack of consideration for biking and walking came up in all five job coach focus groups. Respondents almost universally agreed that clients would not consider biking or walking to work, citing several reasons, including safety, weather, childcare, distance to jobs, and a lack of bike culture and infrastructure.

Security was repeatedly brought up as a reason why clients would not consider active transportation modes. Respondents shared that walking and biking in certain neighborhoods can put you at greater risk of becoming a victim of crime:

Respondent 1: Some areas are just high crime areas. There's no way...

Respondent 2: You're going to be safe riding a bike.

Respondent 1: They're going to ride bikes to work. Absolutely no way. / It's just not feasible. (205)

Additionally, the possibility of getting hit by a car while biking was brought up in several examples, including one respondent who shared:

Not long ago, I had a customer who used her bike to get to and from her destination; she was always on her bike. When I first met her, I looked at her, she had a couple of scars on her face, and I'm thinking to myself, I'm assuming she probably got into a fight. And so me, joking around I asked her, I said, "Did you get into a fight or something?" Because she had a little black eye, she had some scars. She's like, "No, I got hit by a car." How did that happen? "Oh, I was riding my bike, I was in the bike lane and a car just came and hit me and took off." But that wasn't the first time, it happened to her more than once. (203)

While some clients may be willing to bike to work in the summer, respondents did not consider it an option year-round. They expressed doubt that the city would adequately clear snow and ice from bike lanes or along curbs, meaning bicyclists would be forced to share the road with cars in already more dangerous travel conditions. As for clients who drop off or pick up their children from day care or school as part of their commute, respondents felt that biking and walking were not feasible.

The distance that clients had to travel to find good jobs came up as an additional barrier for biking and walking. Respondents mentioned that clients would probably be willing to bike or walk a few blocks to get to a job, but that the best jobs are often located outside of their community. The distance means that clients would arrive to work tired and unpresentable: "Some people would be very tired by the time you get to work. / Agreed, yeah, tired and the smell" (201). This was seen as a challenge especially because work sites often do not have locker room facilities for employees to freshen up before starting their shift.

Respondents recognized that employees on the North side could bike and walk to work more easily than their clients on the South and West sides, due to the presence of more supportive infrastructure, like bike lanes and Divvy stations, and a more prevalent bike culture: "I think on the South side we don't

⁸ Questions consisted of the following: What do clients say about riding a bicycle to work? What barriers do they mention about bicycling?

have that culture. I think that's more North side" (201). Respondents also acknowledged that active transportation is inaccessible to their clients with limited mobility, including older clients.

Employers and Worksites

Employer action/discrimination (job seekers)

The extent to which employers support employee transportation and discrimination related to an applicant's address or transportation mode came up in all ten job seeker focus groups. In general, respondents discussed how employers brought up transportation in the hiring process and shared examples of when employers either disciplined them due to transportation challenges or supported them through transportation programs.

Numerous respondents shared the experience of being asked questions about where they live or how they commute during an interview, including whether or not they have "reliable transportation." Some figured that employers were looking to hire whichever candidate lives closest to their site:

I think employers look at how far you live and use that information to base your dependability. Like if she's gonna show up every day, because they know, just like you know, it's gonna be difficult for you to get there and back every day. And if it takes you over an hour to get to work then they know that that may not be a good fit for you slash them. (104)

To avoid this kind of discrimination in the hiring process, job coaches advise respondents to remove their address from resumes and leave the address blank in online applications.

Other respondents thought employers were just looking for a candidate with a car: "There's a lot of jobs that now require to have a car. No matter if you are public transportation reliable, you have a bike, you have to have a car" (108). One respondent felt that employers used the question to probe for information about an employee's financial situation: "They probably don't even want you if you taking the bus because they think, for whatever reason, that you're, that you don't have funds. You can't afford a car" (104). Respondents expressed frustration that their reliance on public transportation might make them ineligible for certain positions:

Because they try to trick you too. They say, "do you have a reliable transport." And then you write, oh well that must mean, can I get on public transportation and come to the job. And you write, oh yeah, I have public transportation but they don't consider that reliable so they drop your application for that. (108)

Respondents were strategic in the way they answered questions about transportation in interviews, sharing that they used Metra instead of CTA, even when they used both, or downplaying how long the commute actually takes: "Do you have reliable transportation is just, like, a basic question. Everybody's going to say yes because nobody's gonna say no. Nobody's going to be like 'oh, no it takes me 3 hours to get to work'" (103).

Even after the interview process, employers impact an employee's transportation situation by taking specific actions, like varying an employee's schedule: "...it's not just 9:00-5:00 anymore. It's all kinds of shifts and times that they require you to be there, and if you're not there you get fired. And you have to

be on time” (105). New employees are especially prone to being assigned shifts that make transportation more challenging:

And if you’re a new employee you’re gonna get the worst schedule. You know, the latest shifts. So that’s kind of a catch-22. You need a job, but if I’m at the bottom of the list, I’m pretty much gonna be the last one to get off, which is after midnight. (104)

Respondents reported a variety of responses from employers when they arrived late due to unexpected transportation issues. Some companies build in a certain number of flexible hours each quarter that employees can use to arrive late or leave early without penalty. Other companies give employees warnings or deduct points from an attendance log as punishment. Still others would terminate an employee for arriving late: “I was excessively late, over 20 minutes. So, you know. I’ve actually lost my job from the bus. At a time when I didn’t have a car” (108). Respondents shared that the type of work an employee does may determine how strict their attendance policies are:

I was an Assembler Assistant at one of my jobs, but I know that’s like jobs that are hourly where you have to punch in, they’re really stringent on time. As opposed to like a salary job, they know that there is transportation issues and it’s kind of like this flex time that you have. (102)

A few respondents mentioned that if they run into an unexpected issue on their commute, they might call ahead so that their employer would be more forgiving. But still, they felt that if an employer knows an employee relies on public transportation, they should expect occasional delays and not place the burden of proof completely on the employee: “Because there’s no proof we have when we walk in work and say ‘my bus was late.’ That’s everybody’s excuse. Even mine when I wasn’t even on the bus” (103). Some respondents asked for a note from bus drivers or representatives at the train stations to prove to employers that they were late due to a transportation issue, but many others did not know this service was available.

Similarly, a respondent described a situation where they had to go against their employer’s direction and accept the punishment to avoid being stranded without transportation after their shift:

I was working in Calumet City, I had a car, but my car had broke so I was on the bus. And I got up from work at 9:30, but the last bus come in 9 o'clock. So when I ask my boss can I leave at 9:00 so I can catch the last bus, she said, ‘No.’ I said, ‘But I’m going to be stranded out here.’ I just left... Because she said no, and I wasn’t going to be stuck out there, so I just left. But they didn’t fire me, but I got a warning. (110)

Respondents also highlighted employers who support employee transportation, for example, by subsidizing all or part of an employee’s commute: “People would be very grateful to have that and be good workers because they know that they care about me, they’re getting me the rest of the way to the job” (107). Respondents identified companies located in the suburbs that provide shuttle buses from Chicago, but also recognized: “Because usually the companies, it’s like billionaires, they’re the only ones that does the shuttle, so companies that are smaller, they’re not going to even invest in something like that” (106). One respondent’s employer even paid them to drive other employees to work: “I was shuttling other people to work. I got, the company paid me to drive other people” (108).

Employer action/discrimination (job coaches)

Because the focus group instrument had a question about employer perspectives on transportation,⁹ the theme of employer action/discrimination came up in all five job coach focus groups.

Some job coach respondents shared that employers judge an applicant's transportation situation by looking at the address on their resume and by asking if they have "reliable transportation, which is coded language for a private vehicle." Respondents noted that some employers look at the address on applicants' resumes even before deciding to interview them: "And I think one of the big things that we've seen in the past is that a lot of the employers will take the resume and actually look at the address. It got to a point where we were telling them not to put the address on there" (202). Some employers will not hire an employee unless they drive to work, under the assumption that public transportation is not a reliable mode. Most job coaches (78.1%) agreed or strongly agreed that job placement options are limited for job seekers without vehicles. One respondent reflected on the power that employers hold in these hiring decisions, stating: "Again, it's the employers' rule, their way or the highway. They can hire who they want" (201).

Respondents brought up several examples of clients who lost their jobs due to the unreliability of public transportation:

I had a customer that lost a job, they were riding Pace from the suburbs, and the Pace bus was late and it was during their probationary period and so even though the employer knew that the customer lived in the city and used Pace transportation, the bus was late. She got terminated. She was late during the probationary period. (201)

Respondents shared that even if the client was late for a reason that is out of their control, many employers are not understanding: "And there's a number of reasons have delays and employers are not trying to hear that, you're late, you're terminated" (201). Other employers may have a point system or three strikes policy for tardiness, but these programs still punish employees for transportation issues that are beyond their control.

However, other respondents stated that employers do not discriminate against applicants that live far away or do not own private vehicles. These respondents shared that employers only look at these factors if tardiness becomes an issue:

Employers don't care. That's not up for them to care how you're getting to work. As long as you- You're going to be hired from nine to five, eight thirty to four thirty, whatever the case may be, it's on you to figure out how you're going to get to work. They don't care unless it becomes an issue to where the person is constantly late. It's like, hey why's this person late? Well you know they're traveling two hours to get there or they're on the bus or whatever the case may be, then it becomes a question, but it's never a question toward the beginning, as to say, hey this individual is traveling from wherever. We're not going to consider them. (203)

⁹ "What do employers say about transportation in relationship to recruitment and retention?"

Workplace scheduling (job coaches)

Although there were no questions that directly addressed workplace scheduling, the theme came up in all five job coach focus groups. Workplace scheduling was identified as a transportation barrier particularly for clients who rely on public transportation and who work shifts outside of a traditional 9 to 5 schedule, due to the fact that certain routes offer limited service, or completely halt service, at night:

Another barrier is that they, generally I work in the south suburbs, generally it's Pace or Metra. Pace only runs on certain time frames... So if you get off at 10 o'clock at night, you may not be able to catch a bus until 11... and the companies and Pace have not synchronized their schedules, so your shift might end a half-an-hour after Pace stops, and you just stuck. There's no... either you have to wait for another half-an-hour or hour or that could actually be the last bus for the night. So, if you miss it, you'll have to find your own means to get back in the city. (201)

In general, respondents felt that the lack of transportation services outside of mainstream commuting hours limits job opportunities for clients or makes transportation costs excessively high, in terms of both time and money. If a client cannot rely on their local route, they may have to turn to more expensive ride-hail services: "Depends if you have to be at work at a certain time and that bus doesn't start 'til a certain time, then you have to turn to the Ubers, or the Lyfts, or other means of transportation" (202).

Another respondent shared the experience of a client who walks a far distance to the train in the early morning hours because their local bus is not in operation. As such, safety came up as a related concern:

Well I think the barriers could be the area they have to travel to. It could be a dangerous area or they're leaving out where it could be an early morning shift where they're leaving out of the house at 3-4 o'clock in the morning, and the barrier to that is the transportation. Not having a vehicle, getting on the public transportation I could see the barrier being that I am still fearing for my life for leaving, taking a second shift job. (204)

Respondents also discussed how a client's job security can be challenged when an employer changes their schedule without consent:

One time I had a customer that let's say I placed in this one company and it was going fine, he was able to get to and from, but then when they switched his schedule, that's when it became a problem. He actually had to quit because he couldn't get to work. (201)

Another job coach shared a similar situation with a client's schedule:

Well, I had a customer who had a job in Justice and she wasn't able to keep that job, because the Pace bus she had to take to get to work didn't run on Sundays. And they were required to work at least two Sundays out of the month. She asked her employer if they were able to take her off the schedules for Sunday just because of that, she was willing to work every other day except Sundays, not because of any reason except for Pace. And they told her the schedules were all pretty much set, seniority came first, and she had to stick to her schedule. If she was not able to fulfill her schedule, she needed to look for work elsewhere. (201)

Level of employer transportation support (job coaches)

Because the focus group instrument had a question about employer perspectives on transportation,¹⁰ the theme of employer transportation support came up in all five job coach focus groups. The job coach survey results show that 24.4 percent of participants agree or strongly agree and 24.4 percent of participants disagree or strongly disagree with the following statement: Employers I work with are interested in workforce transportation solutions for employee recruitment and retention. The survey results also show that 70.0 percent of participants could neither agree nor disagree with the following statement: Employers I work with would consider redirecting recruitment and training funds to transportation to reduce turnover. In general, respondents felt that support for employee transportation differed widely from employer to employer, making generalizing difficult.

Respondents shared that employers support workforce transportation in a variety of ways. Some provide shuttle buses from central locations, which may or may not charge a fee, or fully or partially subsidize a transit fare card. Others work with transportation agencies to create complementary work and bus schedules, so that employees are not left stranded before or after their shifts. Respondents felt that employers were more likely to provide some kind of assistance if they were located in hard-to-reach suburbs.

There are also employers who provide no assistance at all: “In-demand employers don't have to provide transportation because they already know that they have people that want to work for their company. They don't have to worry about that” (201). One respondent mentioned that employers simply may not know the extent of their employees’ transportation burden: “They're basically sort of disconnected from the reality of what employees go through to get to work” (205). Respondents noted a lack of knowledge about existing programs or about the extent of the transportation burden and a high employee turnover rate as reasons why employers do not invest in employee transportation programs.

Some respondents felt that it should not concern employers how their employees are traveling to and from work, placing the burden exclusively on employees: “If they want the job, they'll find a way to get here” (202). Another suggested that employees should take more initiative and organize their own carpooling programs. Those that felt that employers should be doing more did discuss the role they could have as job coaches in advocating for transportation support, but described the need for more data concerning its success as a retention strategy.

Inequities

Knowledge of inequities (job seekers)

Knowledge of inequities, particularly of transit quality, was a theme identified in six of 10 focus groups; it was thus a recurrent, but not dominant, theme. Multiple focus group discussions noted the different levels of transit service available in the Loop or North side versus the South and West sides, including poor bus service on the South side. Two respondents tied this to differing levels of resources and advocacy:

Respondent 1: So there are more trains and buses running through the North side to make sure people are on time for work, versus the South side or the West side, and that's like a huge issue. Because they have more income to be able to request those

¹⁰ “What do employers say about transportation in relationship to recruitment and retention?”

services, or they're calling in like, "This train is late, this bus is late." People from those areas will complain, and what is it? The greasy? What's the saying?

Respondent 2: The squeaky wheel gets oiled.

Respondent 1: Exactly. So they just kind of need to change that. We all use this system and we all need it to be reliable. (102).

Respondents in another focus group also mentioned different levels of transit policing across different neighborhoods, noting that police were seen on trains "anywhere north of Roosevelt usually. Or it's the really bad neighborhoods or the really good ones" (103).

Knowledge of inequities (job coaches)

Even though the focus group instrument did not have any questions that directly addressed this theme, knowledge of inequities came up in four of the five job coach focus groups. In general, respondents discussed inequities in the public and active transportation systems and in the location of quality jobs.

Discussing inequities in public transportation, respondents brought up both infrastructure and service issues. One respondent shared:

I do want to point out that the CTA is incredibly classist the way the buses are offered and the trains are offered, the neighborhoods they're offered in and where it runs well. It's incredibly based on the income of the neighborhood, like the class level of the neighborhood and that's just always going to have a huge effect until they do something about it. That's going to be where the continued problems are. Like if you're on the North side, you just are going to be able to get places faster. And, if you are on the West side or the South side it's just going to suck for you. (205)

Discussing inequities in active transportation, many respondents shared that their clients do not see bicycling to work as an option for them: "I think they see it as an upper middle class white thing" (205). This lack of bike culture serves as one barrier to biking to work, as does a lack of bike infrastructure and the greater distance between destinations compared to the North side:

I think the stretches here are longer than on the North side. I think everything is more condensed and here everything here is so stretched out. So a ride, riding your bicycle is not like on the North side where it's 20-30 minutes, here it's like an hour or two hours. (201)

Besides inequities in transportation systems, respondents mentioned that there are simply few quality employment opportunities on the South and West sides. This makes commutes longer for those that have to leave their neighborhood to find work:

So for people living in our area and the South side, it's a big barrier because if they want access to better jobs, higher wages, that means commuting an hour, an hour-and-half, two hours and I feel like over time that could kind of, you know, after a year or two years of doing that you could kind of get fed up. (201)

Solutions

Solutions (job seekers)

Because the focus group instrument asked several questions related to this theme,¹¹ job seekers in all ten focus groups identified potential solutions to their transportation challenges. There was more variety than consensus about solutions.

Respondents thought they could limit their job search to areas that are accessible by public transportation or can move closer to their place of employment or to a more transportation-friendly area: “That’s why I moved to Hyde Park. The transportation. Sometimes you have to move places because of the transportation” (104). They also mentioned that they could plan their route ahead and leave early to allow extra time for unexpected delays: “It’s like anytime you have something planned and you know that you need to be there at a certain time, the best advice for that is just to leave early” (101). Arranging carpools and using park and rides were identified as additional strategies to save time and money on their commute.

Some respondents thought that employers should pay for a prospective employee’s transportation costs to get to an interview and should fully or partially subsidize the cost of transportation for employees for at least the first 30 days of employment by providing gas cards, transit fare cards, or free parking. Employers could provide shuttle buses from major transportation hubs and better facilities for bicyclists to freshen up before work. Respondents also suggested that employers could allow employees to work from home or at satellite locations, can move their businesses closer to their labor, and can raise employee salaries.

Respondents felt that employers should work with transportation agencies to arrange for extended hours and more frequency of service to ensure their employees have a reliable route to and from work: “If the businesses can get together with the transit companies to let them know the hours of businesses and that they still have employees that take transportation, that may help the situation” (107). Public transportation can become a faster and more viable option with more bus-friendly infrastructure and express bus routes. Respondents also discussed the need to improve train infrastructure, including completing the planned Red Line extension and expanding the L system to include a north-south route on the West side of the city.

Respondents suggested that they would feel safer if transportation agencies hired more security personnel and installed a better surveillance system. Prioritizing elevator repairs and making sure that elevators go all the way to the platform are interventions that can improve universal accessibility for users: “For public transportation, the elevator’s got to be running all the time” (109). Similarly, providing shelters and benches at all bus stops and providing customer service training to drivers can improve the user experience.

Transportation agencies can provide more accurate real-time updates if a bus or train is delayed, including the reason for the delay: “Maybe communication to the people so if there’s construction, let somebody know or something so they can figure out what they should do differently” (105).

¹¹ Questions consisted of the following: What would make it easier to get to places that help you look for work or places where you receive training? What would make taking transit better as a way to find or keep a job? What would make biking or walking better as a way to find or keep a job? What would make it easier to have a reliable car for getting to work?

Respondents felt that transportation agencies should also help them inform employers of unexpected delays: “I mean I'm not exactly sure how it would all work, but what I'm saying is there should be something available on the internet to show when unforeseen circumstances happen, because a lot of people do lose they job for that” (103).

To overcome cost barriers, respondents felt that transportation agencies should lower the price of their fares, reward frequent users, and allow youth and seniors to ride for free. They also suggested that these agencies work to develop a payment system that makes transfers between different modes easier and more affordable: “If CTA, Metra, and Pace could all use the same transit, that'd make it easier on everybody. If I could jump off Pace or CTA then jump on Metra with the same transfer” (110). More park and ride facilities could make commutes more enjoyable and affordable, especially for respondents who work downtown:

I think parking has always been an issue. A lot of people don't go drive downtown because now they've got parking meters everywhere. And if they came out with more park and ride, where you could park your car at a reasonable cost, two dollars, then get on public transportation. (102)

In terms of improving opportunities to use active modes, one respondent suggested that the city should explore banning cars from certain streets: “I just feel like the main streets should be real biker and bus friendly. I think there should be some streets without no cars. They should actually designate at least two south and north bound and two east and west” (108). Respondents recognized the need for better bike infrastructure that provides more separation from cars and more education for drivers about sharing the road with cyclists. Walking could be encouraged by repairing sidewalks to improve accessibility, by prioritizing snow removal, and by supporting community beautification projects.

Drivers suggested expanding the number of lanes on the city's major highways and investing in road maintenance. To address traffic, a respondent pointed towards policies in Latin America that ban cars with certain license plates from driving on certain days of the week:

There are some cities too that your license, based on what kind of license you have, will only let you drive on certain days of the week. I know a lot of people want to just hop in their car all the time so you are going to catch a lot of resistance. But if it is going to improve the system, we may be better off implementing something to that effect. (102)

The desire for one cohesive transportation system includes the need for equitable transportation service, in terms of quantity and quality, across the city. Several respondents felt that the best way to overcome their transportation challenges is to have more resources and employment opportunities in their own neighborhood, moving past the assumption that they should have to travel far to access employment. Situating the origins of these structural inequities in history, one respondent suggested the best way to overcome their transportation challenges is through the distribution of reparations. Respondents also expressed the desire to be asked for their input, especially when changes are proposed:

Focus group. They need to have focus groups like this. Because they'd understand a lot of things more better instead of just looking at their budgeting, because they cut routes and stuff and not knowing how many people needed this route to go here or there.

They need to have more focus groups of people who really actually care about the people rather than putting dollars in their pocket. (105)

Solutions (job coaches)

Because the focus group instrument had a question directly related to this theme,¹² job coaches in all five focus groups identified potential solutions to their clients' transportation problems.

Respondents thought that helping clients map out route options to job sites, proactively gathering information about a potential employer's transportation programs, and assisting clients with transportation costs beyond their first paycheck, until they are stably employed, can help them overcome transportation challenges. They also suggested offering a financial literacy program to clients and adding a transportation component to their training curriculum: "I don't know if our job... training curriculum touches on transportation, maybe it'd be a good idea to add it, how to plan, how to be realistic in your transportation, and things like that. You have to get ready for the jobs and transportation should be a priority" (202).

Respondents felt that clients could plan ahead for their commute by using transit applications or by calling RTA customer service, or even by practicing the commute before attempting it on an interview or work day: "If you have an interview on Monday, I need you to go this weekend, take a ride over there" (202). Clients could also leave earlier to account for unexpected delays: "And I also think it needs to be taken in consideration that you leave in enough time. What if the bus break down, what if it's raining, what if it's snowing, there's an accident? You have learn to leave in plenty of time to be on time" (202). Other respondents suggested that clients could purchase a car or seek out employees that travel in the same direction and work the same shift to establish a carpool in order not to rely on public transportation. To overcome the barrier of cost, one respondent thought that clients could borrow money from a family member until they are able to absorb their transportation costs. Another respondent recognized the need for social service organizations to make it easier for clients to enroll in transportation and other forms of assistance.

Respondents shared that employers can start by opening up a conversation with employees about their transportation challenges: "I think they can begin just by starting to talk about it because I'd never, and I've been around, employers that never talked about transportation" (205). One respondent suggested that unions should be involved in soliciting employee input and in the development of an employee transportation program. Employers can adjust work shifts to coincide with public transportation schedules and can proactively inform employees about transportation options during orientation: "...maybe the employer can provide information in their orientation saying, the following ride-hail programs are available if you're interested in enrolling" (201). Respondents felt that employers should be more forgiving by offering transportation assistance to employees whose attendance or timeliness begins to suffer, instead of terminating them. They thought that providing employees with a company car or subsidizing an employee's transportation costs can work as a retention strategy: "But you really want to get that incentive, you got to do some stuff... working with somebody to make it easier for them to get there, or cheaper. Do some subsidizing transportation deals" (202). Employers can also provide a shuttle from the workplace to a nearby public transportation hub, perhaps sharing the expense with other nearby employers. Respondents also identified that employers could give employees a raise or

¹² "What transportation solutions would most help clients get to and keep jobs?"

move their operations to a more accessible location to help employees overcome their transportation challenges.

Respondents felt that employers needed to be educated on the benefits of employee transportation programs. They suggested that researchers should study the impact that different kinds of transportation assistance programs have on employee attendance and retention to help job coaches make the case to employers:

That's true, that's why, that was exactly what I was saying, the key word you said, statistic-wise you have to be able to actually present to not just one but several, if you can't show where a statistic of saying how so many people from the city has been coming to these suburbs, working at these jobs but transportation is becoming a big issue... if you can actually present a statistical report and say, so many people, there are so many people that comes out here, away from Chicago, to come to work, statistics has proven this, you know, then maybe they probably would consider, because they always need someone to fill the positions, but it's so far. (204)

With this information, respondents were willing to serve as advocates and even suggested facilitating an information exchange between employers to share best practices. Job coaches also offered the need for additional tax incentives for employers that develop a workforce transportation program: “The state needs to provide more incentives... Tax breaks. It's always about the money, it is” (201).

Transportation agencies can increase the frequency and expand the network of service, improve security on train platforms and on buses, and provide their drivers and customer service representatives with additional customer service training. To address cost, respondents thought transportation agencies could implement a sliding scale payment program, temporary payment assistance, or eliminate fares altogether. Respondents also addressed the issues of marketing and outreach, suggesting that transportation agencies can work to counteract the negative perception of public transportation by hosting workshops with clients or by investing in advertisements: “Public transportation doesn't do a lot of advertising, and most of it is on the radio. You really don't see it on TV. And when you hear things about CTA, it's always negative. Something bad happened to somebody on CTA, so maybe CTA needs to do more advertising” (201).

Discussion and Policy Implications

This section summarizes main themes raised by focus group participants. Qualitative research brings to light the limitations of pursuing an exclusively transportation-focused agenda, calling for a more comprehensive approach. We argue that workforce transportation solutions must proactively address access to jobs for residents in disadvantaged communities, where limited quality employment options exist, and must recognize how transportation barriers are multidimensional and vary based on individual circumstances and neighborhood context. Approaches must address not only the transportation itself, but a range of associated issues commonly faced by disadvantaged workers and job seekers.

The Transportation Experience as a Significant Burden

Respondents often talked about the overall transportation experience as a burden and a source of stress. On top of already excessive commutes, respondents had to consistently budget extra time to accommodate unexpected delays, such as delays from construction or a traffic crash, that they have

simply come to expect. Although respondents did often acknowledge that their transportation challenges are systemic, it was less common to talk about solutions in this way. Many solutions that respondents identified were individual adaptations—such as leaving excessively early—to better navigate the transportation network as it currently operates rather than large-scale systems change. Those with disabilities face the additional stresses of not knowing whether the elevator at the L stop is functional or whether there will be enough accessible seating available on the bus. Those who depend on public transportation may experience stress when traveling to a suburban community with unfamiliar transportation routes and schedules and the anxiety that they might get stuck without a way to return home. The fear of arriving late to work and facing consequences, including being fired, as a result of an unexpected occurrence on public transportation was particularly frustrating; disadvantaged workers have the burden of explaining why they were late to employers that were often unwilling to listen or make accommodations. As a result of these and other factors, including the challenges of the total trip experience, almost three-quarters of participants indicated that transportation was a barrier to getting and keeping a job.

Needed Enhancements for the Transit Customer Experience

Many respondents discussed problems with the customer experience of using public transportation in terms of cleanliness, ease of transfers and fare payment, reliability of service, total time burden, maintenance of elevators, accurate information about delays, and feelings of personal security while riding. The customer experience is a combination of factors both inside and outside the control of CTA, Metra, and Pace, which all face funding limitations. Policymakers and stakeholders, including but not limited to the transit agencies, will improve the viability of transit as an option by addressing aspects of the transit customer experience related to transit operations and community contexts. If the transit customer experience is poor, workers may dismiss transit as an option and fail to consider jobs, even when they are accessible by transit. More funding for transit is needed to address the customer experience factors that the transit agencies directly control, along with community and regional partnerships to address contextual factors that impact the customer experience.

Security

Concerns and stress related to crime and violence were prominent themes in the focus groups. Low- and moderate-income Black and Latinx communities in the City of Chicago experience relatively higher exposure levels to crime and violence, due to past and current disinvestment and inequities across multiple social and policy realms. Several respondents expressed a desire for direct security strategies, including more transit staff or an increased police presence. Focus group findings demonstrate that personal security concerns have a significant effect on which transportation options respondents thought were viable, although the prominence of this theme could be partially associated with a high share of female-identified respondents.

In addition to the direct security interventions noted above, participants identified alternative adaptations to address security. Some turned towards ride-hail or driving, the latter which some participants thought also offered a sense of autonomy; others changed jobs. A system of increasing automobile orientation has equity, traffic safety, livability, and sustainability trade-offs, but driving and ride-hailing can be rational adaptations. Research has likewise identified the role of automobiles in improving employment outcomes for some disadvantaged populations in the current built and social environments of the U.S. (e.g., Blumenburg & Pierce, 2014; Pendall et. al., 2014). These strategies may

be appropriate interim solutions for individuals, and for policy interventions through user subsidies, until the Chicago region addresses the historic and holistic forces that keep disadvantaged workers inequitably burdened. Others point to the individual costs associated with automobile ownership and use (see Smart & Klein, 2018 on costs versus earnings associated with automobiles), in addition to the social costs above.

Findings indicate that analyses of workforce accessibility and transportation systems that do not consider security issues will overlook the constraints respondents face around mobility, especially via active modes and mass transit. Such analyses thus may underestimate the extent of transportation inequities, as experienced by disadvantaged workers, and fail to generate effective solutions for job access. The prevalence of concerns about violence and security suggest that transportation interventions alone—while vital—are likely insufficient for achieving mobility justice.

As a workforce mobility study, this report does not outline specific strategies to address security but asserts the need to work with social justice experts who are leading socially and racially just systems transformation more broadly to address violence (which inhibits mobility). We caution that criminal justice system strategies raise serious concerns, including institutional racism, and fail to address the root social and policy causes of violence (see Lugalia-Hollon & Cooper, 2018). Specifically, in Chicago, the U.S. Department of Justice (2017) has documented multiple, severe problems with policing, including around use of force. In addition, media (Wisniewski, 2019, September 23) and non-profits (ACLU Illinois, 2019) have documented racial inequities in transportation policing more specifically. Furthermore, critics of the current criminal justice system (e.g., Michelle Alexander; Ruth Wilson Gilmore) point to the racial inequities, as well as social system transformations to reduce violence as alternatives to policing and incarceration. Stated directly, we do not recommend increased policing and criminal justice system involvement as strategies to improve workforce transportation, but instead raise the importance of partnerships, funding, and policy changes to address security.

Geography of Access and Opportunity

Residents on the South and West sides of Chicago experience longer average commutes than residents on the North side and surrounding suburbs (CMAP, 2018). Respondents reported having to travel far outside of their community to access a greater share of the region's quality jobs. This distance forces employees to absorb high transportation costs—both temporal and financial—as a result of employers' location choices. Indeed, many job sites are simply impossible to access for those without cars because transit does not reach them or because transit does not operate when work is scheduled.

Typical responses to such spatial mismatches have identified three strategies: growing jobs in city neighborhoods closer to the available workforce, increasing the stock of affordable housing in the suburbs, and improving the regional transportation network. While each strategy offers potential benefits, we caution against transportation-only solutions that expect disadvantaged workers to make excessively long commutes that, combined with reliability uncertainty, result in undue burden and stress. There are multiple potential benefits, including but not limited to job access, from the development of quality jobs on the South and West sides and support of existing and new businesses. While some workers will still commute to destinations across the region, we envision a scenario in which quality jobs exist in closer proximity, making a suburban commute a choice, rather than a necessity, for quality employment.

In addition to the spatial mismatch of residential locations and quality jobs, respondents observed the inequitable geography of transportation services and insufficient infrastructure. Multiple respondents contrasted transit service quality on the South and/or West sides with North side services. Participants noted several barriers to using active modes to get to work, including the great distances people had to travel in their communities. In addition, respondents noted the serious safety risks from vehicular traffic, combined by the lack of infrastructure to protect active mode users. To counter historic and current inequities in transportation, current efforts towards equitable transit and transportation safety infrastructure should be further expanded across all agencies.

Role of Employers in Contributing to Transportation Solutions

Focus group responses indicate that some employers have hiring preferences based on address or transportation mode. Hiring practices that advantage applicants by transportation mode may include questions about “reliable transportation” to gauge automobile access. Such hiring practices disadvantage transit users and those in neighborhoods located far from quality jobs, and we encourage a shift away from such practices.

Participants identified several suggestions for transportation-oriented employer policies that would enhance job retention and reduce employee stress. The solution with the broadest benefits would be for employers to move closer to employee pools or to locations with more transportation choices, particularly high-quality transit. Alternatively, employers could play an active role in making transportation less of a barrier by aligning work hours with public transportation schedules, subsidizing transit fares, offering transportation to connect to CTA hubs, or allowing more flexible work hours and structures. Some employers are realizing that to access talent, they need to locate in places with transit, bicycling, and walking options where a larger labor pool, including people without cars, can access them (MPC, 2018). However, employer-driven transportation support is more common among higher wage workers, leaving lower wage workers with fewer options and a greater relative cost burden. Active engagement on transportation solutions is particularly needed for suburban jobs to be viable for workers relying on transit.

Historic and Holistic Problem

Respondents identified transportation barriers that reflect long-standing inequitable public and private investments that have created and continue to create barriers to employment, especially in South and West side communities. These barriers are experienced cross-generationally and intersect with other community and (in)equity issues, like personal security, traffic risks and fatalities, child and family care work, policing, educational disinvestment, unemployment, health care barriers, community trauma from violence, and limited quality job opportunities. In this way, solutions must be comprehensive and involve engagement with stakeholders at the community and regional scales. One respondent called for reparations, while others called for better quality jobs in close proximity to their communities by investing in economic and community development initiatives. These ideas show that addressing transportation challenges can, and must, involve non-transportation solutions, even as transportation improvements (e.g., improved public transportation frequency and reliability, additional express services, equitable bicycle infrastructure) are vital. Given the historic and continuing inequities in transportation, an equity-based approach would align with Martens’ (2017) framework in which transportation planning starts by identifying those with limited accessibility, rather than using equity as late stage, marginal criteria as is currently common. In addition to centering those with limited

accessibility, an equity approach would consider intersecting social issues and structural racism, not just land use, transportation, employment sites, and travel time models.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Job Seeker Solutions by Stakeholder Type

Job seekers thought of solutions that can be implemented by themselves, by employers, by transportation agencies, by the city, and by other stakeholders.

By employees:

- **Employees can limit their job search to areas that are accessible by public transportation:** “You just got to find a job closer” (109).
- **Employees can plan their route ahead by calling a transportation agency or by using phone applications or the internet:** “Well in my case, I always call CTA first and get my itinerary set up and that gives me the best option to be honest with the employee” (107).
- **Employees can leave early to allow extra time for unexpected delays:** “It's like anytime you have something planned and you know that you need to be there at a certain time, the best advice for that is just to leave early” (101).
- **Employees can arrange carpools or take advantage of park and ride to save time and money.**
- **Employees can move closer to their place of employment or to a more transportation-friendly area:** “That’s why I moved to Hyde Park. The transportation. Sometimes you have to move places because of the transportation” (104).

By employers:

- **Employers can pay for a prospective employee’s transportation to get to an interview.**
- **Employers can fully or partially subsidize the cost of transportation for employees by providing gas gift cards, Ventra cards, or free parking, at least for the first 30 days of employment.**
- **Employers can provide shuttle buses from major transportation hubs:** “So we have three different shuttle buses and we have them for each start, in the morning, and nights. That would be a great thing if the companies would do that for employees” (106).
- **Employers can work with transportation agencies to arrange for extended hours of service:** “If the businesses can get together with the transit companies to let them know the hours of businesses and that they still have employees that take transportation, that may help the situation” (107).
- **Employers can provide more facilities for bicyclists:** “More places, like she said, if they have more amenities for you once you get there, more spaces to actually put your bike, to lock your bike up or whatever” (104).
- **Employers can allow employees to work from home or at satellite locations.**
- **Employers can move their businesses closer to their labor:** “Some people don’t have bus fare to get to the job. You gotta think about that, you gotta get to the job to get the job. How are you gonna get there? So I think that was a great idea. More resources in the community” (107).
- **Employers can raise salaries.**

By transportation agencies:

- **Transportation agencies can build bike infrastructure that provides more separation from cars.**
- **Transportation agencies can work to educate drivers about sharing the road with cyclists:** “So if we are thinking of solutions, there needs to be some more education to drivers about being

more aware of bike riders in the city and understanding that yes, you are in a car, but that doesn't mean you own this. Let's all share and be kind and not run that yellow light" (102).

- **Transportation agencies can expand park and ride facilities to encourage users to take public transportation into the city center:** "I think parking has always been an issue. A lot of people don't go drive downtown because now they've got parking meters everywhere. And if they came out with more Park and Ride, where you could park your car at a reasonable cost, two dollars, then get on public transportation" (102).
- **Transportation agencies can expand the number of lanes on the city's major highways.**
- **Transportation agencies can invest in road maintenance.**
- **Transportation agencies can extend the hours of service of public transportation, especially on major streets:** "I think maybe also extending times, because there are some bus routes that at a certain time, they stop. You're like three, four, five six hours where there is no bus service" (106).
- **Transportation agencies can provide more accurate real-time updates if a bus or train is delayed, including the reason for the delay:** "Maybe communication to the people so if there's construction, let somebody know or something so they can figure out what they should do differently" (105).
- **Transportation agencies, especially those that serve the suburbs, can increase the frequency of public transportation service:** "If they came more frequent, that would also speed it up" (102).
- **Transportation agencies can build more bus-friendly infrastructure to speed up travel.**
- **Transportation agencies can create more express bus routes:** "They don't have an express bus. Now, if they had an express bus, could eliminate some of those stops. You could get home a lot faster. But they do not. They just stop at every stop. 51st. 52nd. 53rd. 55th. 56th. 57th. 58th. All the way down to 99th. And so if they had an express bus to eliminate some of those stops, it wouldn't take us that long to get home" (110).
- **Transportation agencies can expand the L system to include a north-south route on the West side of the city:** "Like we don't have something on the West side of town that takes you from north to south directly. You have to kind of make this huge loop around the city" (102).
- **Transportation agencies can improve their infrastructure:** "I feel like they should upgrade the rail system" (107).
- **Transportation agencies can hire more security personnel and install a better surveillance system.**
- **Transportation agencies can lower the price of their fares:** "I feel like they need to cut their, they need to go down on the bus prices, too" (107).
- **Transportation agencies can reward frequent users.**
- **Transportation agencies can allow youth, including college students, and seniors to ride public transportation for free.**
- **Transportation agencies can develop a payment system that makes transfers between different modes more affordable:** "If CTA, Metra, and Pace could all use the same transit, that'd make it easier on everybody. If I could jump off Pace or CTA then jump on Metra with the same transfer" (110).
- **Transportation agencies should work together to form one cohesive transportation system:** "CTA needs to talk to Pace, needs to talk to Divvy, everybody you know talk to the Chicago- I don't know they name, the traffic people. Everybody needs to be on one accord" (103).
- **Transportation agencies can ensure they are providing the same quantity and quality of service on the North, West, and South sides of the city.**

- **Transportation agencies can make the system more accessible by prioritizing elevator repairs and making sure that elevators go all the way to the platforms:** “For public transportation, the elevator's got to be running all the time” (109).
- **Transportation agencies can provide shelters and benches at all bus stops.**
- **Transportation agencies can provide customer service training to drivers:** “We’ve touched on it a little bit, but they are really rude, and then unknowledgeable” (104).
- **Transportation agencies can help employees inform employers of unexpected delays:** “I mean I'm not exactly sure how it would all work, but what I'm saying is there should be something available on the internet to show when unforeseen circumstances happen, because a lot of people do lose they job for that” (103).
- **Transportation agencies can solicit more community input:** “Focus group. They need to have focus groups like this. Because they'd understand a lot of things more better instead of just looking at their budgeting, because they cut routes and stuff and not knowing how many people needed this route to go here or there. They need to have more focus groups of people who really actually care about the people rather than putting dollars in their pocket” (105).

By the city:

- **The city can explore banning cars from certain streets:** “I just feel like the main streets should be real biker and bus friendly. I think there should be some streets without no cars. They should actually designate at least two south and north bound and two east and west” (108).
- **The city can adopt a policy that bans cars with certain license plates from driving on certain days of the week:** There are some cities too that your license, based on what kind of license you have, will only let you drive on certain days of the week. I know a lot of people want to just hop in their car all the time so you are going to catch a lot of resistance. But if it is going to improve the system, we may be better off implementing something to that effect” (102).
- **The city can move forward on its plan to expand the Red Line.**
- **The city can repair sidewalks to improve accessibility:** “Also with the sidewalks too, because I be trippin’. I don’t fall, but I be trippin’” (107).
- **The city can more closely regulate ride share services for safety:** “They need more regulated laws. They don’t have regulated laws like personal drivers. They have to do so much to get a medallion for the cabs, but for Uber and Lyft, you just go apply” (107).
- **The city or state can pass a reparations bill.**

By other stakeholders:

- **Job training centers can open more locations in neighborhoods:** “If we had more places that facilitate helping us find employment in our community. We have to come out of our community. That would make it easier” (107).
- **Communities can implement safety and beautification interventions:** “If we get more people, or the community – always back to the community – if we get the community to care about where they live, it’ll be better and then we can get more businesses to come and hire us” (107).
- **Chicago Public Schools can develop a more robust yellow school bus program so that school children are not overwhelming CTA buses before and after school:** “I think they need to really, seriously come up with a better school bus. Maybe not particularly dropping the kid off a block

away or maybe in front of the home but I think that yellow bus system needs to be for the kids and the public transportation needs to be for the adults” (108).

Appendix B: Job Coach Solutions by Stakeholder Type

Job coaches suggested solutions that can be implemented by themselves, by clients, by employers, by transportation agencies, and by other stakeholders.

By job coaches:

- **Job coaches can advocate for employer transportation programs and facilitate an information exchange between employers to share best practices.**
- **Job coaches can gather more information for clients about whether a potential employer offers transportation assistance:** “I guess for my role, my role is that I go out and I try to get these companies to partner with us, so maybe I can be a little bit more intentional on seeing if they can provide, if they are a company that has, and ask are you a company that provides some type of transportation for people who are traveling from the city to the suburbs, or vice versa. And could you provide that information, so we can post it to our customers. So it will allow them to be able to make an informed choice and selection for a job opportunity” (204).
- **Job coaches can add a transportation component to their training curriculum for clients:** “I don't know if our job... training curriculum touches on transportation, maybe it'd be a good idea to add it, how to plan, how to be realistic in your transportation, and things like that. You have to get ready for the jobs and transportation should be a priority” (202).
- **Job coaches can provide financial literacy training for clients:** “Ultimately I think a financial literacy training or something. Because you want to wean them off of these bus cards, and at some point they're going to have to be on their own. We kind of want to teach them how to manage their money. Because some of them have money, they just don't know how to manage it” (204).
- **Job coaches can work one on one with clients to map out their route options.**
- **Job coaches can assist clients with transportation costs beyond the first paycheck, until they are stably employed.**

By clients:

- **Clients can plan ahead for their commute by using transit applications or by calling RTA customer service.**
- **Clients can practice the commute before attempting it on an interview or work day:** “If you have an interview on Monday, I need you to go this weekend, take a ride over there” (202).
- **Clients can leave early enough to account for unexpected delays:** “And I also think it needs to be taken in consideration that you leave in enough time. What if the bus break down, what if it's raining, what if it's snowing, there's an accident? You have learn to leave in plenty of time to be on time” (202).
- **Clients can purchase a car in order not to rely on public transportation.**
- **Clients can seek out employees that travel in the same direction and work on the same shift to establish a car pool, perhaps through the Pace Vanpool program.**
- **Clients can borrow money from a family member.**

By employers

- **Employers can educate employees about transportation options during orientation:** "...maybe the employer can provide information in their orientation saying, the following ride share programs are available if you're interested in enrolling" (201).
- **Employers can open up a conversation with employees about their transportation challenges:** "I think they can begin just by starting to talk about it because I'd never, and I've been around, employers that never talked about transportation" (205).
- **Employers can be more forgiving by offering transportation assistance to employees whose attendance or timeliness begins to suffer, instead of terminating them.**
- **Employers can adjust work shifts to coincide with public transportation schedules.**
- **Employers can subsidize some or all of an employee's transportation costs:** "But you really want to get that incentive, you got to do some stuff... working with somebody to make it easier for them to get there, or cheaper. Do some subsidizing transportation deals" (202).
- **Employers can provide a shuttle from the workplace to a nearby public transportation hub, perhaps sharing the expense with other nearby employers.**
- **Employers can provide employees with a company car.**
- **Employers can give employees a raise:** "Nobody gets a raise anymore. If it is, it's 3%. All I'm saying is that's an issue. That's an issue. But people are taking the jobs because they need a job" (202).
- **Employers can move their operations to a more accessible location:** "So I think that maybe some employers may want to look at something in the Chicago area where they are accessible via public transportation" (204).

By transportation agencies:

- **Transportation agencies can increase the frequency and expand the network of service.**
- **Transportation agencies can improve security on train platforms and on buses.**
- **Transportation agencies can implement a sliding scale payment program, temporary payment assistance, or eliminate fares altogether.**
- **Transportation agencies can work to counteract the negative perception of public transportation:** "Public transportation doesn't do a lot of advertising, and most of it is on the radio. You really don't see it on TV. And when you hear things about CTA, it's always negative. Something bad happened to somebody on CTA, so maybe CTA needs to do more advertising" (201).
- **Transportation agencies can do more outreach and education with clients:** "In Minnesota, public transportation there, their version of CTA, the reps would come out to non-profit organizations and government programs and would speak with my participants like monthly or quarterly and tell them about what routes were out there and what options were out there" (205).
- **Transportation agencies can provide their drivers and customer service representatives with additional customer service training.**

Other stakeholders:

- **The state can provide tax incentives to employers that develop a workforce transportation program:** "The state needs to provide more incentives... Tax breaks. It's always about the money, it is" (201).

- **Unions can help employees connect to existing transportation or can work with the employer to develop a transportation program.**
- **Social service organizations can make it more convenient for clients to enroll in transportation and other forms of assistance:** “They have a lot of different programs that can help. We do need more, absolutely we do need more resources so that we can point some of these customers to the right direction” (204).
- **Researchers can study the impact that different kinds of transportation assistance programs have on employee attendance and retention to help job coaches make the case to employers:** “That's true, that's why, that was exactly what I was saying, the key word you said, statistic-wise you have to be able to actually present to not just one but several, if you can't show where a statistic of saying how so many people from the city has been coming to these suburbs, working at these jobs but transportation is becoming a big issue... if you can actually present a statistical report and say, so many people, there are so many people that comes out here, away from Chicago, to come to work, statistics has proven this, you know, then maybe they probably would consider, because they always need someone to fill the positions, but it's so far” (204).

Appendix C: Job Seeker Survey

Transportation and Job Access

We will talk about transportation issues more in the group, but want individual responses to the questions below. Your responses are confidential and anonymous. We will not connect this information to specific things you say in the group or your identity.

1. How did you get to the center today?
 Transit (CTA, Pace, Metra)
 Drove
 Got a ride
 Walked
 Biked
 Uber or Lyft
 Taxi
 Other, Please specify _____

2. Have transportation challenges made you miss out on job opportunities?
Please circle YES NO

3. Is transportation a barrier to keeping a job?
Please circle YES NO

4. Have you ever moved your home so that it was easier to find or keep a job?
Please circle YES NO

5. Have you ever taken a job that meant you needed to buy or borrow a car?
Please circle YES NO

6. Have you experienced a disability that limited your ability to take transit or drive to work?
Please circle YES NO If yes, please circle TRANSIT DRIVE

Household and Personal information

1. What is your age? _____

2. What is your gender?
 Female
 Male
 Other

3. What is your race or ethnicity? Please mark all that apply.
- Black/African-American
 - White/Caucasian
 - Asian
 - Latino/Hispanic/Latina/Latinx
 - Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander
 - American Indian or Alaska Native
 - Other, Please specify _____
4. What is the primary language spoken in your household? _____
5. How many people live in your household? _____
6. How many working cars, trucks, or vans do you have in your household? Please write 0 if you have none. _____
7. Do you have a smartphone, like an iPhone or Android?
Please circle YES NO
8. Do you have a credit or debit card?
Please circle YES NO
9. What is your home ZIP code? _____
10. What is the highest level of school you have completed?
- Less than high school
 - Completed high school
 - Some college
 - Two-year degree
 - Four-year degree
 - Graduate degree
11. What is your approximate annual household income?
- \$9,999 or less
 - \$10,000-\$19,999
 - \$20,000-\$29,999
 - \$30,000-\$39,999
 - \$40,000-\$49,999
 - \$50,000 and over

Appendix D: Job Seeker Survey Results

82 participants completed surveys, though some were partially incomplete.

Question 1.1: How did you get to the center today?

Mode	Number of Respondents	Percent
Transit	45	50.6%
Drive	23	25.8%
Ride	7	7.9%
Walk	6	6.7%
Uber/Lyft	6	6.7%
Bike	1	1.1%
Other	1	1.1%
Taxi	0	0.0%
TOTAL	89	100.0%

5 respondents chose 2 modes and 1 respondent chose 4 modes.

Question 1.2: Have transportation challenges made you miss out on job opportunities?

Answer	Number of Respondents	Percent
Yes	58	73.4%
No	21	26.6%
TOTAL	79	100.0%

Question 1.3: Is transportation a barrier to keeping a job?

Answer	Number of Respondents	Percent
Yes	59	73.8%
No	21	26.3%
TOTAL	80	100.0%

Question 1.4: Have you ever moved your home so that it was easier to find or keep a job?

Answer	Number of Respondents	Percent
Yes	29	35.8%
No	52	64.2%
TOTAL	81	100.0%

Question 1.5: Have you ever taken a job that meant you needed to buy or borrow a car?

Answer	Number of Respondents	Percent
Yes	40	50.0%
No	40	50.0%
TOTAL	80	100.0%

Question 1.6: Have you experienced a disability that limited your ability to take transit or drive to work? If yes, please circle TRANSIT DRIVE

Answer	Number of Respondents	Percent
No	70	85.4%
Yes	5	6.1%
Yes, Transit	1	1.2%
Yes, Drive	0	0.0%
Yes, Both	6	7.3%
TOTAL	82	100.0%

Question 2.1: What is your age?

Range	Number of Respondents	Percent
18-24	18	22.8%
25-29	8	10.1%
30-39	13	16.5%
40-49	11	13.9%
50-59	16	20.3%
60-69	13	16.5%
TOTAL	79	100.0%

The youngest age reported is 18, while the oldest age reported is 69. The mean age is 41.5 and the median age is 41.

Question 2.2: What is your gender?

Gender	Number of Respondents	Percent
Female	57	69.5%
Male	25	30.5%
Other	0	0.0%
TOTAL	82	100.0%

Question 2.3: What is your race or ethnicity? Please mark all that apply.

Race/Ethnicity	Number of Respondents	Percent
Black/African American	61	78.2%
White/Caucasian	3	3.8%
Asian	0	0.0%
Latino/Hispanic/Latina/Latinx	7	9.0%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	1	1.3%
American Indian or Alaska Native	2	2.6%
Other	4	5.1%
TOTAL	78	100.0%

No participant selected more than one race or ethnicity. 4 participants wrote in responses next to "Other."

Question 2.4: What is the primary language spoken in your household?

Language	Number of Respondents	Percent
English	77	97.5%
Spanish	2	2.5%
TOTAL	79	100.0%

Question 2.5: How many people live in your household?

Number of People	Number of Respondents	Percent
0	1	1.3%
1	26	32.9%
2	18	22.8%
3	20	25.3%
4	12	16.0%
5	2	2.5%
TOTAL	79	100.0%

The respondent who answered “0” informed a Research Assistant that he was homeless. Excluding the respondent who answered “0”, the mean number of people per household is 2.3 and the median number of people per household is 2.

Question 2.6: How many working trucks, cars, or vans do you have in your household?

Number of Vehicles	Number of Respondents	Percent
0	37	47.4%
1	24	30.8%
2	13	16.7%
3	4	5.1%
TOTAL	78	100.0%

Question 2.7: Do you have a smartphone like an Android or iPhone?

Answer	Number of Respondents	Percent
Yes	78	97.5%
No	2	2.5%
TOTAL	80	100.0%

Question 2.8: Do you have a credit card?

Answer	Number of Respondents	Percent
Yes	66	84.6%
No	12	15.4%
TOTAL	78	100.0%

Question 2.9: What is your zip code?

Region	Number of Respondents	Percent
Far North Side	1	1.3%
North Side	3	3.8%
Northwest Side	1	1.3%
West Side	22	27.5%
Downtown/Central	1	1.3%
Southwest Side	10	12.5%
South Side	20	25.0%
Far Southeast Side	16	20.0%
South Suburbs	5	6.3%
West Suburbs	1	1.3%
TOTAL	80	100.0%

Question 2.10: What is the highest level of school you have completed?

Level of Education	Number of Respondents	Percent
Less than high school	8	10.1%
Completed high school	16	20.3%
Some college	32	40.5%
Two-year degree	8	10.1%
Four-year degree	10	12.7%
Graduate degree	5	6.3%
TOTAL	79	100.0%

Question 2.11: What is your approximate annual household income?

Household Income	Number of Respondents	Percent
Less than \$9,999	26	34.7%
\$10,000 - \$19,999	18	24.0%
\$20,000 - \$29,999	13	17.3%
\$30,000 - \$39,999	7	9.3%
\$40,000 - \$49,999	7	9.3%
\$50,000 and over	4	5.3%
TOTAL	75	100.0%

Appendix E: Job Seeker Focus Group Guide

We want to learn about your transportation experiences.

First, let's talk about how you got here today.

1. How did you get to the center? What challenges did you face getting here or will you face getting home?
2. What would make it easier to get places that help you look for work or places where you receive training?

Let's talk more about searching for jobs.

3. How do you usually get to job interviews? Why is that the way you travel?
4. What challenges do you face getting to interviews?
5. How does transportation affect what jobs you apply to or interview for?
6. How do you think transportation, including whether you have a car or a driver's license, could affect whether you get hired for a job?

Now, we're going to talk about past job experiences you might have had.

7. In previous jobs, how have you gotten to work?
8. What challenges did you face getting to work?
9. What workplace challenges, like discipline or getting fired, have you faced because of transportation problems?

Transportation Needs/Potential Solutions

These next questions are about your ideas about making transportation better.

Let's talk about transit, like Pace, Metra and the CTA.

10. What would make taking transit better as a way to find or keep a job?

Now, we'll talk about biking and walking.

11. What would make biking or walking better as a way to find or keep a job?

Now, let's think about cars.

12. What would make it easier to have a reliable car for getting to work?

As we've talking about, there are lots of ways to get around. For these last two questions we'd like you to think about all the different ways of getting around, like transit, walking, biking, cars, taxis, Uber and Lyft.

13. What two or three things would most help you get to job opportunities?
 - a. If say car, say what would help them get and maintain but also ask for "other than a car"
14. What two or three transportation changes would most help you keep a job?

Appendix F: Job Coach Survey

We will talk about transportation issues more in the group, but would like individual responses to the questions below. Your responses are confidential and anonymous. We will not connect this information to specific things you say in the group or your identity.

Please circle a response to show how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
1. Transportation is a significant barrier to placing clients at jobs.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Transportation is a significant barrier for clients in keeping jobs.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Former clients discontinue work placements frequently because of transportation challenges, (for example long public transit commutes or car breakdowns).	1	2	3	4	5
4. Job placement options are limited for job seekers without vehicles.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I have sufficient information about all transportation options (Metra, CTA, Pace, Pace vanpool, carsharing, Dial -a- Ride, Lyft, Uber, bikeshare, cycling) to advise clients on how to get to potential job sites.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I know how to use route planning tools to help clients plan transportation options.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Training on transportation options would help me better advise clients about getting to job sites.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I seek out employers/job placement sites that are on public transit.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Employers I work with are interested in workforce transportation solutions for employee recruitment and retention.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Employers I work with would consider redirecting recruitment and training funds to transportation to reduce turnover.	1	2	3	4	5

11. How long have you been in your current jobs: _____(in years)

12. Please estimate what percent of employers you work with are on public transit: _____%

13. Please estimate the percent of your clients who do not have cars available: _____%

Appendix G: Job Coach Survey Results

42 respondents completed surveys, though some were partially incomplete.

Question 1: Transportation is a significant barrier to placing clients at jobs.

Answer	Number of Respondents	Percent
Strongly disagree	3	7.1%
Disagree	0	0.0%
Neither agree nor disagree	3	7.1%
Agree	11	26.2%
Strongly agree	25	59.5%
TOTAL	42	100.0%

Mean: 4.3

Question 2: Transportation is a significant barrier for clients in keeping jobs.

Answer	Number of Respondents	Percent
Strongly disagree	3	7.1%
Disagree	0	0.0%
Neither agree nor disagree	4	9.5%
Agree	13	31.0%
Strongly agree	22	52.4%
TOTAL	42	100.0%

Mean: 4.2

Question 3: Former clients discontinue work placements frequently because of transportation challenges.

Answer	Number of Respondents	Percent
Strongly disagree	3	7.3%
Disagree	2	4.9%
Neither agree nor disagree	11	26.8%
Agree	18	43.9%
Strongly agree	7	17.1%
TOTAL	41	100.0%

Mean: 3.6

Question 4: Job placement options are limited for job seekers without vehicles.

Answer	Number of Respondents	Percent
Strongly disagree	3	7.3%
Disagree	3	7.3%
Neither agree nor disagree	3	7.3%
Agree	19	46.3%
Strongly agree	13	31.7%
TOTAL	41	100.0%

Mean: 3.9

Question 5: I have sufficient information about all transportation options to advise clients on how to get to potential job sites.

Answer	Number of Respondents	Percent
Strongly disagree	2	4.9%
Disagree	6	14.6%
Neither agree nor disagree	10	24.4%
Agree	14	34.1%
Strongly agree	9	22.0%
TOTAL	41	100.0%

Mean: 3.5

Question 6: I know how to use route planning tools to help clients plan transportation options.

Answer	Number of Respondents	Percent
Strongly disagree	1	2.4%
Disagree	6	14.3%
Neither agree nor disagree	3	7.1%
Agree	14	33.3%
Strongly agree	18	42.9%
TOTAL	42	100.0%

Mean: 4.0

Question 7: Training on transportation options would help me better advise clients about getting to job sites.

Answer	Number of Respondents	Percent
Strongly disagree	1	2.5%
Disagree	0	0.0%
Neither agree nor disagree	10	25.0%
Agree	20	50.0%
Strongly agree	9	22.5%
TOTAL	40	100.0%

Mean: 3.9

Question 8: I seek out employers/job placement sites that are on public transit.

Answer	Number of Respondents	Percent
Strongly disagree	2	5.0%
Disagree	3	7.5%
Neither agree nor disagree	13	32.5%
Agree	11	27.5%
Strongly agree	11	27.5%
TOTAL	40	100.0%

Mean: 3.7

Question 9: Employers I work with are interested in workforce transportation solutions for employee recruitment and retention.

Answer	Number of Respondents	Percent
Strongly disagree	1	2.4%
Disagree	9	22.0%
Neither agree nor disagree	21	51.2%
Agree	5	12.2%
Strongly agree	5	12.2%
TOTAL	41	100.0%

Mean: 3.1

Question 10: Employers I work with would consider redirecting recruitment and training funds to transportation to reduce turnover.

Answer	Number of Respondents	Percent
Strongly disagree	2	5.0%
Disagree	5	12.5%
Neither agree nor disagree	28	70.0%
Agree	3	7.5%
Strongly agree	2	5.0%
TOTAL	40	100.0%

Mean: 3.0

Question 11: How long have you been in your current job?

Answer	Number of Respondents	Percent
0 – 2.9 years	12	29.3%
3 – 5.9 years	9	22.0%
6 – 9.9 years	7	17.1%
10 – 14.9 years	2	4.9%
15 +	11	26.8%
TOTAL	41	100.0%

Question 12: Please estimate what percent of employers you work with are on public transit.

Answer	Number of Respondents	Percent
0 – 24.9	5	15.6%
25 – 49.9	2	6.3%
50 – 74.5	11	34.4%
75 – 100	14	43.8%
TOTAL	32	100.0%

Question 13: Please estimate the percent of your clients who do not have cars available.

Answer	Number of Respondents	Percent
0 – 24.9	2	5.3%
25 – 49.9	3	7.9%
50 – 74.9	17	44.7%
75 – 100	16	42.1%
TOTAL	38	100.0%

Appendix H: Job Coach Focus Group Guide

We'd like to learn about how transportation factors into job searches and job retention in your work with clients and employers. We also want to hear your ideas for improving workforce transportation.

First let's talk about client placement and job retention.

1. What's a typical example of how transportation can be a barrier to placing clients?
2. What's a typical example of how transportation can be a barrier for clients in retaining their jobs?
3. What other ways can transportation be a barrier for job placement or retention?

Next, I'd like to learn what clients tell you about different ways of getting around.

4. What do clients say about riding public transit, like the CTA and Pace, to work?
5. What barriers do they mention about using public transit?
6. What do clients say about riding a bicycle to work?
7. What barriers do they mention about bicycling?

We also want to learn about employer perspectives on transportation.

8. What do employers say about transportation in relationship to recruitment and retention?
9. How could you interest them in improving workforce transportation?

Our final questions are about ideas to improve knowledge about and quality of transportation options for job seekers.

10. There are lots of transportation options in the region, like Metra, CTA, Pace, Pace vanpool, carsharing, Dial -a- Ride, Lyft and Uber, bikeshare, and cycling. There are also route planning tools. What more do you want to know about transportation options to help your clients?
11. What transportation solutions would most help clients get to and keep jobs?