
***BARRIERS TO WORK:
THE SPATIAL DIVIDE BETWEEN JOBS AND
WELFARE RECIPIENTS IN METROPOLITAN AREAS***

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The time limits and work requirements of the 1996 welfare reform law present a great challenge to large U.S. metropolitan areas, where hundreds of thousands of low-income people must find entry-level jobs. The welfare-to-work effort underway in American cities uncovers a phenomenon that many scholars already knew: there is a “spatial mismatch” between where workers live and where jobs are located, and low-income workers often have no easy way to travel between home and work.

Officials at the federal, state, and local levels already are scrambling to solve spatial mismatch through transportation solutions, yet they lack solid information about what spatial mismatch is, why it occurs, and how best to remedy it through transportation. A review of empirical literature and practical work shows that not all metropolitan areas experience the same degree of spatial mismatch, and that policy solutions may vary from city to city.

This discussion paper does three things. First, it proposes an index by which we could assess the degree of spatial mismatch and categorize metropolitan areas according to the severity of mismatch. Second, it performs a preliminary categorization of five cities to illustrate the varying degrees of mismatch found among metropolitan areas with large welfare populations. Third, it makes both short and long term recommendations for federal and state policies.

These policy prescriptions are informed by several observations:

- Low-income transportation programs are not simple to execute. They may need to be integrated with other services and flexible in order to adapt to the work schedules of entry-level workers.
- The choice between urban community empowerment and suburban job access does not have to be an either-or proposition. Giving central city workers mobility to travel to and from suburban jobs increases family earnings and, in turn, increases the capital flowing back into urban neighborhoods.
- Suburbs are not monolithic. They may vary widely in their degree of transit accessibility and job quality. Job placement strategies need to distinguish between outer- and inner-ring suburbs; they should not be demand-driven, placing workers in jobs regardless of the distance from the city or whether the quality of the wage outweighs the opportunity cost of the commute.

- Transportation solutions should aim to enact incremental and systemic changes that create transportation equity for low-income people and improve long-term transportation systems for families of all incomes – not to create “special” programs for the inner city poor.

The short term policy recommendations argue strongly that new federal grant programs, particularly the “Access to Jobs” grants to be awarded by the U.S. Department of Transportation, must be targeted, coordinated, and sustainable in order to properly mitigate the effects of spatial mismatch. Specifically:

- Federal grants for low-income transportation programs must be targeted to those (often large) metropolitan areas which are experiencing the most severe spatial mismatch.
- These grants should reward applicants whose efforts maximize the resources of the existing metropolitan transportation system, utilize a variety of transportation modes reflecting the transportation and labor market patterns of the metropolitan area at large (e.g., public transit, private transit, vanpools, and cars), and prioritize job placement according to transportation accessibility and job quality.
- Federal leaders must lead by example and make low-income transportation programs an integrated part of federal urban transportation policy, taking steps to enforce more seamless coordination among federally-funded transit and transportation agencies within a metropolitan area.
- Federal agencies should incorporate more rigorous evaluation measures into new low-income transportation grants, and they should improve federal information infrastructure to make place-based statistical data more accessible to local program implementers.

The long term policy recommendations call upon federal, state, and local leaders to connect welfare reform efforts to metropolitan “smart growth” strategies. The recommendations are:

- Federal, state, and local leaders must recognize that spatial mismatch is not inevitable, and they must cease thinking of low-income job access as an issue having to do with mobility. The goal must be to bring jobs and people closer together, through controlling sprawl, increasing affordable housing in the suburbs, and strengthening urban economies.
- Policy makers and program implementers must gear their effort towards achieving transportation equity – that is, giving low-income people the same number of transportation options as middle- and upper-income people. Increasing car ownership among low-income people is integral to this approach.

II. INTRODUCTION

In May 1998, the *New York Times* told the story of Dorothy Johnson, an inner-city Detroit resident who takes two buses and two hours to travel to an evening job cleaning office buildings in the suburbs. Johnson's commute would take only 25 minutes if she could afford a car, and even her public transit journey could be shortened if the city and suburban bus lines coordinated their routes and increased their off-hour services. Despite the inconvenience of the commute, the article concluded that a suburban job is often the best option for workers like Dorothy Johnson, and that entry-level jobs in the central cities are scarce and sometimes lower-paying.¹

Policy makers are beginning to pay more attention to the transportation challenges faced by low-income central city residents, largely because of the passage two years ago of a sweeping national welfare reform, the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act. Under the law, millions of low-income people, almost all of whom are women, must find a job or face losing their welfare benefits. This requirement has created hundreds of stories like Dorothy Johnson's in cities across the nation: a mother fights her way off of welfare, obtains a job, finds child care, but must endure a grueling journey to a suburban workplace on a public transit system that is ill-equipped to handle the "reverse commute"² and odd hours of many entry-level jobs. Her transportation problems sometimes cause her to lose her job because of tardiness, or quit out of exhaustion. She then begins the job-hunting cycle again, still forced to look for work in the suburbs because there are so few job opportunities closer to home.

The Structural Context

The stories of welfare mothers are compelling, but it is important to remember that the low-income urban transportation bind is a long-standing problem that affects a large population, of whom welfare recipients are only a small part. Today's welfare reform transportation concerns are one aspect of a larger problem created by decades of economic and social change in American cities. Some urban welfare mothers may face additional challenges because of their lack of work history and their responsibilities as a single parent, but these difficulties are often shared by other low-income central city residents, particularly other women. The transportation bind is not something created by whether a person is on welfare or not; it is precipitated by where a person lives. It is a problem of place, not of people.

In many large U.S. urban areas, fifty years of suburbanization and the growth of the post-industrial

¹ Robyn Meredith, "Jobs Out of Reach for Detroiters Without Wheels," *New York Times*, May 26, 1998, A12.

² By the term "reverse commute" we mean the trip from a central city residence to a suburban job. In many of today's metropolitan job markets, this pattern may occur more frequently than the traditional "commute" between suburban residence and city job. This is particularly true for the working poor. In 1990, 78% of the white working poor and 60% of the black working poor commuted from suburb to suburb or "reverse commuted" from city to suburb (Katherine M. O'Reagan and John M. Quigley, "Cars for the Poor," *Access* 12 [Spring 1998], 22).

economy have resulted in a significant portion of entry-level jobs locating outside the city limits, while the bulk of the urban poor (mostly minorities) remain in the central city.³ Public transit routes, even if they are extensive in the city, do not reach many suburban employment centers. Even where trains and buses might reach a workplace, the entry-level job could start and end at times when mass transit does not run. Suburbs were designed for workers with cars, and even those low-income and working-class people who have access to private transportation may not be able to afford the maintenance, insurance, and other costs associated with a long daily commute.⁴

For many years, scholars have debated the dimensions and causes of “spatial mismatch,” a phenomenon roughly defined as the geographic gap between jobs and people that leads to a lack of economic opportunity in poor neighborhoods. Welfare reform is teaching us that there *is* such a phenomenon as “spatial mismatch.” In many metropolitan areas, entry-level jobs are one place, low-income workers are concentrated in another place, and there is no easy way to bridge the spatial gap in between.

The existence of spatial mismatch greatly affects the outcome of the national welfare reform effort because large cities (which are already home to a large number of welfare recipients⁵) have an increasingly disproportionate share of the nation’s welfare caseload. The Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy documented this trend in an earlier working paper, finding that, in a survey of 23 large metropolitan areas, two-thirds of the jurisdictions had welfare caseloads declining at a slower rate than that of their states between 1994 and 1997.⁶

As we have noted above, however, the problems associated with spatial mismatch go beyond welfare reform. Low-income central city residents, regardless of their gender or their receipt of public assistance, will likely face a transportation bind in a metropolitan area that has a severe spatial divide between employers and job seekers. As a consequence, this severe mismatch can hamper a metropolitan area’s ability to reduce unemployment and restore economic health to central city neighborhoods. It can also affect the economic health of suburbs, whose employers may be struggling to find entry-level workers.

³ This holds true particularly for the so-called “Frostbelt” cities of the industrial Northeast and Midwest. Most of these cities experienced triple-digit increases in suburban service and retail sector employment during the past thirty years; during the same period many of these cities experienced similarly massive increases in the percentage of their metropolitan area populations living in high poverty neighborhoods (“The Economic State of Milwaukee: The City and the Region, 1998,” Center for Economic Development, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, May 1998, Tables 4.12, 5.9, and 5.10).

⁴ In 1995, the average annual expenditure for non-public transportation in single-parent households was about \$3,700 (*1997 Statistical Abstract of the United States*, Section 14: Income, Expenditures and Wealth, 463).

⁵ Margaret Weir writes that the counties that contain the ten largest cities in the United States accounted for 22 percent of the entire national [AFDC] case load in 1993 (“Big Cities Confront the New Federalism,” in *Big Cities in the Welfare Transition*, edited by Alfred J. Kahn and Sheila B. Kamerman [New York: Cross-National Studies Research Program, Columbia University School of Social Work, 1998], 10-11).

⁶ Bruce Katz and Kate Carnevale, “The State of Welfare Caseloads in America’s Cities” (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy, May 1998).

It is indisputable that transportation is only one of many barriers low-income city residents face in obtaining and keeping a job. Workers may have significant education and job training needs, have difficulty in finding safe and affordable child care, suffer racial discrimination, or lack good information about job opportunities or hiring networks. In addition, transportation may be more or less of a barrier depending on where one lives; there are still good, transit-accessible jobs in some central cities and, particularly in places where jobs are highly suburbanized, a significant percentage of low-income people in many cities may have cars to take them to work.⁷

However, transportation remains a significant job access⁸ challenge for many low-income and working-class people. Although the problem has to this point been documented only anecdotally or through city-specific empirical case studies, the magnitude of the problem facing some U.S. cities is clear. Some policy experts also believe that -- unlike other barriers to job access like housing discrimination or low educational levels -- this is one problem that public or private entities could quickly mitigate through adequate funding of income-targeted transportation services.

The Policy Context

Spurred by the immediate needs of welfare reform, policy makers have responded quickly to try and lessen the severity of the low-income transportation problem. Some of these programs are targeted specifically to former welfare recipients, others serve broader segments of the working poor. A number of states and counties have used welfare block grants and other federal funds to support both urban and rural transportation services for welfare recipients.⁹ These efforts are about to get a massive boost from the federal government. As part of the newly reauthorized federal transportation law, Congress created a \$750 million competitive grant program -- called "Access to Jobs" -- to fund transportation services for low-income workers.¹⁰

⁷ While the percentage of low-income car owners varies from city to city, it is incorrect to assume that cars are not a transportation option for most low-income workers. In 1990, over 3/4 of below-poverty households in the U.S. owned one or more vehicles. Over 80% of near-poverty households owned at least one vehicle (Charles Lave and Richard Creapeau, "Travel By Households Without Vehicles," *1990 Nationwide Personal Transportation Survey: Travel Mode Special Reports*, December 1994, 1-15). Vehicle ownership in poor households may have been grossly underreported in the past because pre-1996 welfare regulations often prohibited recipients of public assistance from owning an "asset" like a car; to keep their benefits, many recipients may not have reported their car or may have placed its ownership in another person's name.

⁸ Barriers to work for low-income people can be placed into two categories -- challenges resulting from individual needs (such as job training, education, child care, disability) and challenges that come about as a result of structural societal conditions (such as urban deindustrialization, job suburbanization, racial segregation, inadequate public transit). While we acknowledge that the former group of needs have an extremely significant effect upon an individual's ability to obtain and retain a job, this paper concerns itself only with the latter category, which we will refer to broadly as "job access."

⁹ For examples, see the Community Transportation Association of America's "Access to Jobs: A Guide to Innovative Programs in Welfare-to-Work Transportation," <http://www.ctaa.org/welfare>, February 1998.

¹⁰ Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), PL 105-178, Section 3037. The "Access to Jobs" program currently is funded at \$150 million per year for five years. Five hundred million of program funds will be made available from the Mass Transit Account of the Highway Trust Fund; the remaining \$250 million is authorized, but yet to be appropriated, by Congress. Eligible

The new federal resources could provide an excellent opportunity for some metropolitan areas to expand current transportation access efforts and better integrate transportation for low-income workers into the mission of their regional transportation plans. Accomplishing these tasks will not be easy. In large cities, low-income job access programs require a great deal of collaboration among governmental agencies and other stakeholders -- human service, job training, and transportation agencies as well as private employers and community-based organizations -- who rarely have had to interact with one another in the past. Because of the difficulty of large-scale collaboration as well as cost and logistical constraints, many existing programs are narrowly targeted, only serving a small percentage of a metropolitan area's low-income population. This targeting may be the result of the income eligibility requirements of federal funds (such as the new Welfare-to-Work grant program administered by the U.S. Department of Labor) that generally restrict services to those persons who have been on welfare or would be welfare-eligible.¹¹ Eligibility restrictions often mean that these federal funds cannot be used to expand existing transportation services (like city-suburban bus lines) that may serve a wider low-income and working-class population.

There are other on-the-ground challenges to bridging the spatial gap between low-income workers and jobs. Many metropolitan leaders lack consistent information about the causes and dimensions of their transportation problems, and they have few sources of advice about how to best design a sustainable transportation program. Metropolitan areas also may struggle to distinguish between job access problems that are transportation-related and require mobility-focused solutions, and those that have to do with other barriers such as job readiness, labor market information, or employer discrimination.

To better understand their spatial mismatch problem, researchers in some large cities have begun to document and map entry-level job growth trends in order to pinpoint the job access needs of the local low-income population. Yet these efforts are not widespread, and they take time to accomplish. Policy makers and practitioners rightfully argue that there is no time to waste, as hundreds of thousands of these families face a ticking clock of welfare reform time limits and need immediate help.

There is a very real concern that the rush to beat the ticking welfare time limit clock may lead to the creation and implementation of federally-funded transportation programs that are not well-informed by the realities of metropolitan economic and demographic growth. The lack of good empirical and evaluatory information about low-income transportation programs also creates a danger that the new federal funds available for low-income transportation might be used in ways that are less effective over the long term and do little to remedy the structural conditions that limit low-income job access in many cities. Welfare reform implementers, struggling to place thousands of low-skilled workers in jobs, rarely have the luxury of pausing

beneficiaries are any workers whose family income is at or below 150% of the federal poverty level.

¹¹ The federal Welfare-to-Work legislation, enacted as part of the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, requires that at least 70% of program beneficiaries be "hard-to-employ individuals." There are three categories of individuals who may be served under this provision: long-term welfare recipients with barriers to employment, a noncustodial parent of a minor who is a welfare recipient, or former welfare recipients who are no longer on welfare because they have passed the lifetime time limit on assistance (20 CFR Part 645).

to consider how recipients' transportation problems connect with the larger trends of metropolitan change. As a result, in too many places, policy makers think of low-income transportation strategies as small initiatives separate from metropolitan transportation planning or from larger labor market decisions.

Goal of the Study

The purpose of this study is not to identify ways to implement welfare reform, although the welfare-to-work effort is serving as a catalyst for increased low-income job access in many metropolitan areas. It is not intended to address all aspects of why low-income people have difficulties obtaining and retaining jobs, even though many of these barriers to work are interconnected. This paper focuses on possible strategies to remedy job access problems for low-income people through transportation-focused solutions.

The study will review what existing empirical research has taught us about the nature of the job access problem in U.S. cities and explore the lessons being learned from ongoing programs about the design and implementation of transportation-focused job access initiatives. Low-income transportation access *is* a problem with a reachable solution, but the solution must be carefully crafted. The study asks three questions:

1. *What has the spatial mismatch literature taught us and how can policy makers put these findings to practical use?*

The findings of recent empirical research and the lessons of program implementation confirm the “spatial mismatch hypothesis” and indicate that several conditions create or exacerbate low-income people’s transportation barriers. Some of these job access barriers could be remedied by transportation-based solutions; others could not. The first part of the paper will discuss some of the recent scholarly debate on this topic and propose a set of factors that could enable policy makers to categorize metropolitan areas by severity of spatial mismatch – thereby identifying places that require special and sustained attention.

2. *How do low-income job access problems differ from city to city?*

The evidence demonstrates that there are wide variations among cities. The experience of five diverse metropolitan areas -- Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, and Philadelphia -- demonstrate the varying degrees to which transportation is a barrier for low-income workers. The differences among metropolitan areas argue for a targeted federal policy that remedies these problems where they are most severe. The second part of this paper will be devoted to these city profiles, through which we will also show how economic and demographic characteristics affect the relative weight of transportation as a barrier to work as compared to other issues, such as child care or job readiness.

3. *What are the policy options?*

Welfare reform and the Access to Jobs program are opportunities to not only enhance low-income job access strategies centered around transportation, but to begin to make services for low-income populations a mainstream component of general transportation planning. The administrators and potential grantees of the Access to Jobs money and other public funding can take several steps to ensure that programs are targeted to areas of greatest need, coordinated across metropolitan areas to ensure transportation equity, and sustainable over the long term. Empirical and programmatic evidence indicates that the geographic gap between low-income urban residents and many entry-level jobs widens when suburbs grow unchecked and central cities are withering. If this is the case, low-income transportation planning should be linked to metropolitan-wide strategies and “smart growth” solutions. The third part of this paper will discuss the considerations that should be made at the federal, state, and local levels in order to maximize the effectiveness of new federal resources, and then address the long-term policy reforms that can effect structural change.

Building on the Challenge of Welfare Reform

Welfare reform has created enormous challenges for America’s largest metropolitan areas. As welfare rolls decline, central cities -- with their harder-to-serve populations -- are home to a larger proportion of the national caseload. However, the 1996 welfare law has created some important opportunities for American cities. In many places, it has prompted a new wave of collaborative public policies and important new research about the needs of low-income urban populations. It is beginning to change the public perception of welfare mothers, who no longer are seen as passive recipients but as active participants in the metropolitan labor market. And it has focused the attention of policy makers at all levels of government on the interaction between welfare reform, job creation, and community economic revitalization. This paper is intended to take advantage of these opportunities.

To start, policy makers must try to understand the array of factors that contribute to spatial mismatch. The barriers between low-income workers and good jobs are numerous, and they are often related. White flight and suburban housing discrimination contribute to increased racial segregation and the concentration of minorities in cities; urban decline exacerbates and concentrates poverty in these minority neighborhoods; job suburbanization, deindustrialization, and globalization contribute to the further separation of low-income minorities from the metropolitan marketplace. It is difficult to isolate one cause of low-income workers’ job access difficulties, and equally difficult to prescribe policy solutions that can address that one cause.

All this being said, this paper is an attempt to reexamine a problem that already has been singled out for a public policy solution. It attempts to define the nature of the low-income transportation problem and recommend guidelines for transportation-oriented solutions, while keeping in mind the interaction of various

socioeconomic and structural characteristics that continue to bar welfare mothers and other low-income people from accessing the suburban job market.

Again, providing adequate transportation services are by no means the “silver bullet” for resolving low-income job access and economic equity. Inner-city residents face myriad challenges in entering and staying in the workforce. Yet sensible, sustainable transportation policies can, by increasing mobility and job opportunity, help level the playing field between low-income urban workers and the rest of the metropolitan workforce as well as serve as a catalyst for growth patterns that benefit metropolitan residents of all income levels.

III. THE SPATIAL MISMATCH DEBATE

Welfare reform and its emphasis on work and self-sufficiency has brought new attention to the way American metropolitan and economic growth during the past fifty years has affected urban labor markets. Since World War II, older cities have emptied as middle-class white city residents fled to the suburbs; jobs and further development followed. Housing discrimination and poverty left low-income minorities in central cities where good jobs became more and more difficult to find. In most U.S. cities with large poverty populations, these urban residents were predominantly African American.¹²

A Review of the Academic Literature

There has been extensive scholarly research during the last 30 years on the effects of job suburbanization and the consequent labor market isolation of low-income people. In 1968, three months before the Kerner Commission's famous report concluded that the United States was becoming two societies, "one black, one white -- separate and unequal,"¹³ economist John Kain published an analysis of the impact of housing market discrimination on black employment. Studying evidence from Chicago and Detroit, Kain tested data on place of work and place of residence obtained from 1952 and 1956 data.¹⁴ From these calculations, he concluded that housing discrimination and resultant residential segregation affected both the spatial distribution of black employment and the rate of unemployment among blacks. He found the increased suburbanization of jobs to be a factor that aggravated these problems.¹⁵

¹² The West and Southwest are the two regions of the country where blacks usually remain in the minority in central cities. This seems to be the result of two factors: (1) the high number of Hispanics (and, to a much lesser degree, Asians) in Western and Southwestern cities; and (2) the ability of many cities in these regions to expand their administrative boundaries, thereby incorporating richer neighborhoods. David Rusk has labeled the latter phenomenon "elasticity" (*Cities Without Suburbs* [Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1993]).

¹³ National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, *Report* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1968). The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders was the official name of the Kerner Commission, established by President Lyndon Johnson in 1967 in the wake of riots in many poor urban neighborhoods. Its chairman was Otto Kerner, the then-Governor of Illinois.

¹⁴ Detroit Area Traffic Study, "Part 1 – Data Summary of Interpretation," *Report on Detroit Metropolitan Area Traffic Study* (Lansing, MI: July 1955); *Chicago Area Transportation Study*, Vol. 1 (Chicago, 1959).

¹⁵ John F. Kain, "Housing Segregation, Negro Employment, and Metropolitan Decentralization," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 82 (May 1968): 175-97.

Kain's findings came to be known as the "spatial mismatch hypothesis." While Kain was not the first scholar to have focused on the effects of suburbanization on the low-wage labor market, his analysis became the standard that later scholars would attempt to confirm or disprove and, as one scholar put it, "the idea remains as controversial today as it was ... when it was first proposed."¹⁶

Among Kain's critics was David Ellwood, who in the 1980s disputed the spatial mismatch hypothesis using evidence gathered from census tracts in Chicago's poorest neighborhoods. Using 1970 and 1975 demographic data, Ellwood compared unemployment rates between black teenagers living on the West Side, near large concentrations of jobs, and on the South Side, where "the only smoke stacks ... are those of schools and churches." Ellwood found little difference in unemployment rates between the two areas, and concluded that "race, not space, remains the key explanatory variable."¹⁷ Ellwood's "race versus space" argument would continue to influence the spatial mismatch conversation among urban economists and poverty researchers throughout rest of the 1980s and 1990s. However, academic debates have centered more around the relative importance of race and class as explanatory variables; few have disputed the role of spatial gaps between poor minorities and jobs in causing inner-city joblessness.¹⁸

The controversy and dissent surrounding spatial mismatch derives from the fact that the "hypothesis" itself is an ill-defined approach that lacks a theoretical basis.¹⁹ As Kain has observed in his later writings, he did not even use the term "spatial mismatch hypothesis" in his original article, nor did he prescribe a set of variables needed to measure spatial mismatch. Some more recent scholarly articles on spatial mismatch have pointed out that lack of a consistently-used set of measurements is the cause of the contradictory findings of Kain, Ellwood, and other scholars -- and of the "race versus space" discussion in general.²⁰ We also argue that the age of the data used in earlier tests of the spatial mismatch hypothesis makes their conclusions less relevant to the demographic and economic patterns of late 1990s metropolitan America.

¹⁶ Harry J. Holzer, "The Spatial Mismatch Hypothesis: What Has the Evidence Shown?," *Urban Studies* 28:1 (February 1991), 105, quoted in John F. Kain, "The Spatial Mismatch Hypothesis: Three Decades Later," *Housing Policy Debate* 3:2 (May 1992). Both articles are useful reviews of the spatial mismatch literature through the early 1990s.

¹⁷ "The Spatial Mismatch Hypothesis: Are There Teen-Age Jobs Missing in the Ghetto?," in *The Black Youth Employment Crisis*, ed. Richard B. Freeman and Harry J. Holzer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 177, 149.

¹⁸ The degree to which racial discrimination is a factor in urban joblessness and social isolation has been a heated and prominent debate among urban sociologists. Douglas Massey and Nancy A. Denton argue that spatial mismatch correlates highly with the racial segregation of blacks, and that segregation is a main cause of black unemployment (*American Apartheid* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993]). William Julius Wilson has argued famously for "the declining significance of race" or, specifically, the importance of "class and space" rather than "race and space." See William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) and *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996).

¹⁹ Richard Arnott's recent article "Economic Theory and the Spatial Mismatch Hypothesis" (*Urban Studies* 35: 7 [June 1998], 1171-86) addresses this lack of a theoretical model. Arnott observes that "because [the spatial mismatch hypothesis'] conceptualization is incomplete, no policy implications can logically be drawn from it." Arnott proposes a trade-theoretic model that uses as its variables three regions (central city, suburb, and the rest of the world), four goods (tradable home goods, untraded services, tradable foreign goods, and land), and two factors (skilled and unskilled workers).

²⁰ Ihlanfeldt and Sjoquist; Kain 1993.

New Growth Trends, New Research

During the thirty years since Kain first advanced the spatial mismatch hypothesis, suburban areas have grown exponentially in many areas of the country. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development recently estimated that the national suburban population is growing twice as fast as that of the cities and that joblessness remains higher in most central cities than in suburbs.²¹ In many areas, rapid growth is creating an outer ring of “exurban” areas that extend miles from the metropolitan core. Job-growth trends often correlate with the race and wealth of an area’s residents. Wealthier, whiter suburbs tend to have the bulk of new jobs in metropolitan areas.

While African Americans have suburbanized to a certain degree, they often have relocated to predominantly black suburbs that in many metropolitan areas are distant from the most vibrant metropolitan job growth centers. Overall, the nation’s suburban areas remain disproportionately white.²² Paul Jargowsky noted these changes in his 1997 study of inner-city neighborhood distress, *Poverty and Place*:

Metropolitan areas have transformed in response to residents’ demands for spatial amenities and to changing modes of production. From an economic point of view, these are positive adaptations. But the pooling of poor individuals in urban centers ... is no longer a viable means for poor individuals to get connected to the larger economy.²³

In the age of the suburb and the exurb, labor markets have spilled across city and county boundaries and become metropolitan-wide. The gap between rich and poor, black and white, has become wider.

The transformative growth patterns in American metropolitan areas during recent decades should lead us to question why research that uses statistical data from the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s has continued to set the parameters of the spatial mismatch debate. Fortunately, very recent scholarship is giving this issue more empirical consistency. Most of the recent research efforts into the spatial mismatch hypothesis have been intensive case studies of one large metropolitan area or a few metropolitan areas; some of these studies have focused on the job access of welfare recipients in particular. The studies tend to correlate three sets of data: the number and location of people on public assistance in a metropolitan area, the number and location

²¹ “The State of the Nation’s Cities” Database, Center for Urban Policy Research, Rutgers University, <http://policy.rutgers.edu/cupr/SoNC.htm>, January 1998. Also see *The State of the Cities* (Washington: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, June 1998) Exhibits 9 and 11.

²² Kain discusses black suburbanization and continued racial segregation in “The Spatial Mismatch Hypothesis: Three Decades Later,” 382-85.

²³ New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1997, 203.

of entry-level jobs, and travel times between home and work.²⁴

The findings have been stunning. Using 1990 Census data, researchers have shown that centers of greatest entry-level job growth are often located so far away from central cities that a reverse commute on public transportation -- the primary mode of travel for many low-income urban residents -- becomes impractical. In most of the nation's sprawling metropolitan areas, the spread of suburban growth has far outpaced the reach of city-based public transit systems. While in some cities there has been a documented wage increase for comparable work the farther one travels into the suburbs,²⁵ a lack of convenient mass transit means that the cost of the reverse commute in both money and time is often so great that it may match or even exceed any wage increase.

In two of the case studies -- one in Cleveland and one in Atlanta -- researchers plotted the residential locations of welfare recipients, entry-level job opportunities, and public transit systems onto a map. The results showed that: (1) welfare households were clustered in central city or inner suburban neighborhoods; (2) a significant number of job opportunities were in outer suburbs far away from recipients' central city homes; and (3) many of these suburban jobs were inaccessible by any mode of transportation other than a car.²⁶ Studies underway in other cities indicate that this pattern is replicated elsewhere. The patterns found for welfare recipients also are found to correlate with race. One of the few recent multi-city studies found that central city job growth raised black employment rates, and that job locations play a larger role in black employment than do social interactions.²⁷

Recent scholarship on the travel patterns of low-income women adds to the findings of spatial mismatch studies in documenting the particular transportation challenges welfare mothers might face in their transition to the workplace. The research documents the interaction between spatial mismatch, gender discrimination, and racial discrimination in the entry-level workplace. It has found that transportation

²⁴ These include: Harry J. Holzer, Keith R. Ihlanfeldt, and David L. Sjoquist, "Work, Search, and Travel Among White and Black Youth," *Journal of Urban Economics*, May 1994: 320-45; Keith Ihlanfeldt and Madelyn V. Young, "Housing Segregation and the Wages and Commutes of Urban Blacks: The Case of Atlanta Fast-Food Restaurant Workers," *Review of Economics and Statistics*, August 1994: 425-33; Mark Alan Hughes, "Learning from the 'Milwaukee Challenge'," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 15:4 (April 1996), 562-70; Holzer and Ihlanfeldt, "Spatial Factors and the Employment of Blacks at the Firm Level," *New England Economics Review*, May/June 1996, Special Issue: 65-82; Claudia Colton, Laura Leete, and Neil Bania, "Housing, Transportation and Access to Suburban Jobs by Welfare Recipients in the Cleveland Area," paper presented at the Fannie Mae Foundation Policy Research Roundtable, July 1997; Annalynne Lacombe, "Welfare Reform and Access to Jobs in Boston," report prepared for the U.S. Department of Transportation, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, January 1998; Paul Ong and Evelyn Blumenberg, "Job Access, Commute and Travel Burden among Welfare Recipients," *Urban Studies* 35:1 (January 1998), 77-93; Michael Rich and Joseph Coughlin, "The Spatial Distribution of Economic Opportunities: Access and Accessibility Issues for Welfare in Metropolitan Atlanta," paper presented at the 94th Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers, March 1998; Steven Raphael, "The Spatial Mismatch Hypothesis and Black Youth Joblessness: Evidence from the San Francisco Bay Area," *Journal of Urban Economics* 43:1 (January 1998), 79-111; Bruce A. Weinberg, "Testing the Spatial Mismatch Hypothesis Using Inter-City Variations in Industrial Composition," July 1998.

²⁵ Ihlanfeldt and Young.

²⁶ Colton et al.; Rich and Coughlin.

²⁷ Weinberg. The study used data from 195 metropolitan areas with populations over 100,000.

constraints for low-income women take on a different dimension because of “trip chaining”: the incorporation of a number of smaller trips – like dropping children off at day care – into daily commuting patterns.²⁸

The findings of much of the recent scholarly literature support Kain’s spatial mismatch hypothesis; in fact, there seems to be more consensus on the validity of this idea than there was in the past.²⁹ The evidence is particularly compelling in the case of welfare recipients, who often live in high-poverty neighborhoods of central cities and older suburbs.³⁰

However, the new research points out a very important fact: *metropolitan areas do not experience the same degree of spatial mismatch*. The changes of the past fifty years have resulted in various degrees of job suburbanization, poverty concentration, and transportation problems in all of the nation’s largest metropolitan areas. Thus the effects of these changes on the degree of job access for today’s welfare recipients varies greatly from city to city. In some places, there are still a significant number of entry-level job opportunities in the central city. In others, suburban jobs are relatively well-clustered along public transit corridors. Some cities do not have one centralized area of poverty but instead have clusters of poverty that are often close and accessible to areas of job richness.³¹ While these conditions may not erase the obstacles faced by low-income people (particularly women with child care needs), they mitigate the effects of spatial mismatch and may reduce the degree to which lack of transportation is a barrier to employment.

Scholarly research all too rarely has geared itself to an audience of policy makers and practitioners, and as a consequence local program administrators may have found it difficult to identify and incorporate the academic findings on spatial mismatch into the design of low-income transportation programs. Until quite recently, technology was a significant barrier to making academic research widespread and accessible to local program implementers. Today, the scope of on-line information as well as the spread of geographic mapping software make it much simpler to present empirical data in a way that can serve as a catalyst for policy planning and implementation. The conversation between academics and policy makers and practitioners remains in its early stages but may accelerate as a result of this new technology and increased program needs.

²⁸ Recent scholarship includes Sara McLafferty and Valerie Preston, “Gender, Race, and Commuting Among Service Sector Workers,” *Professional Geographer* 43:1 (February 1991) and “Spatial Mismatch and Labor Market Segmentation for African-American and Latina Women,” *Economic Geography* 68:4 (October 1992), 406; Susan Hanson and Geraldine Pratt, *Gender, Work, and Space* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Ibipo Johnston-Anumonwo, “Race, Gender, and Constrained Work Trips in Buffalo, NY, 1990,” *Professional Geographer* 49: 3 (August 1997), 306-317.

²⁹ Keith Ihlanfeldt and David Sjoquist argue that the more widespread agreement with the hypothesis is due in part to the fact that “recent research has developed measures of job access that better capture the nearness of available jobs appropriate to low skilled workers” (“The Geographic Mismatch Between Jobs and Housing,” forthcoming in *The Atlanta Paradox: Race, Opportunity, and Inequality in a New Southern City*, 11).

³⁰ Weir 10-12.

³¹ Los Angeles is one example of this. See Ong and Blumenberg.

Lessons from Practical Experience

The experience from local implementation of welfare reform often underscore the recent academic findings about the existence of spatial mismatch and the transportation gap between workers and jobs. Suburban job placement strategies are important components of nearly every metropolitan area's welfare-to-work program, and it is clear that in many cities the vast bulk of entry-level jobs would be unavailable to welfare recipients if they did not gain access to additional transportation services. Lessons from welfare-to-work programs also reinforce the scholarly findings about women's travel patterns, particularly "trip chaining."

The results of policy implementation also remind us of the multivariate nature of job access and the importance of making distinctions between cities. Even in the former industrial cities of the East and Midwest, the evidence cautions us not to assume that nearly all entry-level jobs have suburbanized, nor to believe that existing public transit is wholly inadequate in solving the problem.

In St. Louis, for example, program administrators found that, while a significant number of entry-level jobs have moved to the suburbs, a rich employment base of transit-accessible replacement jobs still exists in the central city. The city's biggest challenge is to increase work-readiness skills.³² In New Jersey, welfare administrators found that 94% of all welfare recipients in the state lived within a ½ mile of an existing public bus line; consequently, welfare to work planning has focused not on creating new transit lines but instead on coordinating existing services and targeting job placement to transit-accessible corridors.³³ In some sites funded by Bridges to Work, a five-city federal demonstration project begun in 1995 to help transport job-ready low income people to work, program implementers are finding that it is hard to recruit and retain participants because transportation is rarely the only barrier to obtaining and keeping a job. Personal needs such as child care and job readiness may limit many people from participating in Bridges to Work. One of the more successful sites, Chicago's Suburban Job-Link, has a large client base in part because it does not restrict itself to transportation but incorporates job-readiness training and job placement into its services.

Creating a New Index for Framing Spatial Mismatch

The recent scholarly literature and policy practitioners' observations of large metropolitan areas and their transportation challenges show that bridging the transportation gap is not as simple as creating a new van line or subsidizing mass transit vouchers. They also reinforce the idea that effective solutions to the

³² Blair Forlaw, "Work, Wheels, and Wages, or Why MPOs Had Stake in Welfare-to-Work Even Before TEA-21 Said It Was So," presented to the 1998 Transportation Planning Conference, Welfare to Work Issues Session, June 1998.

³³ "Summary of Transportation Initiatives," New Jersey Department of Human Services, New Jersey Department of Transportation, and NJ TRANSIT, July 1998.

transportation problem should be tailored at the metropolitan level to match the spatial, demographic, and labor market dynamics of a particular city.

Recent scholarly and programmatic evidence, in fact, presents a more complicated -- but perhaps more realistic -- response to the spatial mismatch debate. Rather than conclude simply that spatial mismatch does or does not exist, or come down solely on the side of “race” or “space,” these results suggest that a measurable “index” of spatial mismatch that captures the full spectrum between highly mismatched and barely mismatched would be extremely valuable. A metropolitan area’s place on such an index could be predicated on the intensity of four interlinking factors:

1. *Size -- both demographic and geographic -- of a metropolitan area*

There is convincing empirical support for the observable phenomenon that population size affects the existence of spatial mismatch, although researchers have not been able to specify why it occurs. There may be a number of reasons. In most areas with a small-to-medium population size (i.e., under 1 million population metropolitan-wide), there is less distance between the central city and the farthest suburbs, thereby reducing travel time and commuting costs for low-income workers. Smaller cities also may be less likely to have extensive public transit systems and more likely to have affordable car maintenance and insurance rates, thereby increasing the likelihood that low-income residents will have access to a car.³⁴

Geographic size is another dimension that seems to determine the degree of spatial mismatch. This may correlate with the age of a metropolitan area. Newer cities were designed around automobile use, and they tend to cover more space and have lighter, suburb-like densities of jobs and people throughout their metropolitan areas. Because they are more likely to be able to expand their boundaries to include more affluent neighborhoods and strengthen their tax base, they tend to have less concentrated areas of poverty.³⁵ They do not experience the “hole in the doughnut” phenomenon of older cities whose once-dense downtowns have emptied into the suburbs. Job richness may be more evenly distributed among different census tracts in a metropolitan area, and all residents -- rich and poor -- are more likely to have cars.

2. *Racial segregation of a metropolitan area*

The extent of racial segregation in a metropolitan area often has to do with the size of the minority population, and whether an area’s minority population is primarily African American, primarily Hispanic, or

³⁴ In his 1992 study of job access for urban teenagers, Keith Ihlanfeldt found that “job access is found to have a strong effect on a youth’s job probability as long as he/she lives in a metropolitan area with more than 800,000 people. However, for youth living in the smallest size class of metropolitan areas (i.e., fewer than 800,000 in population), none of the job access effects for any of the racial groups is significantly different from zero.” (*Job Accessibility and the Employment and School Enrollment of Teenagers*, [Kalamazoo, Mich.: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, 1992], 78-79). Bruce Weinberg’s recent study supports this trend; his analysis found that “there is little evidence that job locations affect employment status in [metropolitan areas] with less than 500,000 residents” (17).

³⁵ Rusk 62-64.

multi-ethnic. Metropolitan areas with a high percentage of one minority group are more likely to have central city census tracts that are “hypersegregated,” meaning that high rates of racial segregation and dense poverty create neighborhoods that are socially and economically isolated. This phenomenon is most pronounced in metropolitan areas with black-white segregation patterns. The centralized clustering of hypersegregated census tracts is rarer in heavily Hispanic or multi-ethnic metropolitan areas.³⁶

Segregation not only affects physical access to jobs but also influences the degree to which workers are well-informed about the metropolitan job market and its growth patterns. Hypersegregation and spatial distance increase the likelihood that low-income workers will be cut off from both formal and informal sources of information about jobs. Studies have found that there can be a tremendous information gap in rapidly growing metropolitan areas; workers are often not aware of where they should be searching for a job because of the relative newness of some suburban or exurban employment centers.³⁷

3. *Degree of job decentralization and relative labor market tightness between city and suburbs*³⁸

We argue that this variable is made up of two distinct elements: the degree to which *net job growth* has suburbanized, and the *overall number of entry-level job opportunities* (both new and vacated existing or replacement jobs) in the central city. While the former element may have more weight than the latter in most cities,³⁹ it appears that both elements affect the intensity of spatial mismatch. These variations may correlate with the age and the size of a metropolitan area. They also are related to the degree of suburban sprawl and uncontrolled land use in the metropolitan periphery, measured by the absolute growth in farmland conversion or the percentage increase in developed land in a metropolitan area. As the following case studies will show, job suburbanization and suburban sprawl has not been uniform across metropolitan areas; some places have retained a good number of entry-level jobs in the central cities and inner suburbs. These may often be replacement jobs, rather than new jobs.

³⁶ Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton introduced the term “hypersegregation” to describe urban areas that rated high in at least four of five dimensions of measurement of segregation: evenness, exposure, concentration, centralization, and clustering (“Hypersegregation in U.S. Metropolitan Areas: Black and Hispanic Segregation Along Five Dimensions,” *Demography* 26 [1989]: 373-92). For further discussion of the contrast between black and Hispanic residential segregation, see also Reynolds Farley and William Frey, “Latino, Asian, and Black Segregation in U.S. Metropolitan Areas: Are Multiethnic Metros Different?” *Demography* 33 (1996).

³⁷ One recent study assessing this information gap is Keith Ihlanfeldt, “Information on the Spatial Distribution of Job Opportunities within Metropolitan Areas,” *Journal of Urban Economics* 41: 2 (March 1997), 218-241.

³⁸ For evidence of the job growth gap between city and suburb in the nation’s ten largest SMSAs, see Mark Alan Hughes, “The Administrative Geography of Devolving Social Welfare Programs,” Joint Occasional Paper 97-1 of the Center for Public Management and the Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1997), 18.

³⁹ Mark Alan Hughes, Steven Raphael, and others have found that net employment growth is the major determinant of entry-level vacancies in metropolitan areas, and that low job growth in central city neighborhoods may have a strong negative effect on the probability of low-income unemployment. See for example Hughes and Julie E. Sternberg, “The New Metropolitan Reality,” (Washington, D.C.: Public Finance and Housing Center, The Urban Institute, December 1992) 9-17; Hughes, “Learning from the ‘Milwaukee Challenge’”; Raphael, “Inter- and Intra-ethnic Comparisons of the Central City-Suburban Youth Employment Differential: Evidence from the Oakland Metropolitan Area,” *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 51:3 (April 1998), 505-25.

4. *Effectiveness of the metropolitan transportation system*

The effectiveness of a metropolitan area's transportation system can be measured by a number of factors, such as the extent to which public transit has adapted to labor market changes across time and space, the degree of car ownership, the retention rate of valid drivers' license, and the affordability of car insurance and maintenance. Some metropolitan areas may have well-developed public transit systems within the central city or central county, but have inadequate service in the suburbs. In many metropolitan areas, service among transportation providers in different counties is uncoordinated and ineffective for a worker making a reverse commute from city to suburb, or even suburb to suburb. In addition, public transit rarely accommodates the entry-level or part-time worker's need to travel to and from work at non-traditional hours. While some cities with extensive bus and rail systems -- New York and Washington, D.C., for example -- may provide services late into the night, most American metropolitan areas do not have these sorts of public transit services. Effectiveness of mass transit systems could be empirically gauged by tabulating the number of miles and stops on a metropolitan public transit system, the density of transit coverage per square mile, the time it takes to travel between city and suburb on public transit, and whether routes and ridership are growing or shrinking.

The degree of car ownership usually correlates with the size and age of the city. Older cities, even ones that have experienced dramatic job suburbanization, tend to have more transit-dependent populations and fewer low-income car owners. Larger cities tend to have higher rates of car insurance, maintenance, and theft, making the costs of owning an automobile prohibitive for low-income families.⁴⁰ An empirical test of this factor could tabulate the distribution of cars per household by income, race, and geography.

These four factors are proposed indicators to help define an index of spatial mismatch. They are speculative and preliminary; they do not make an index. There also are other factors, such as the degree of government fragmentation or the pace of regional economic growth, that clearly contribute to the severity of a metropolitan area's low-income transportation problems. An empirical, multi-city study is needed to test and weigh these variables and determine their applicability in creating categories of spatial mismatch. If empirically possible, a spatial mismatch index would be useful even in a political context where states and localities have a great deal of policy-making autonomy. It would create a standard mechanism by which to compare cities, and it would provide guidance for a better targeted and more intensive intervention of federal resources. We strongly recommend that a study to create this sort of index be performed in the near future. It

⁴⁰ "Auto Choice" legislation aimed at reducing high urban insurance rates is under consideration by the U.S. Congress. This measure would "unbundle" coverage for pain and suffering losses, allowing drivers to buy cheaper insurance that covers economic losses only. Sponsors of the legislation argue that it particularly would benefit the urban poor because of dramatically higher levels of accidents and non-economic liability claims in inner cities. Two recent papers addressing this issue are Jeffrey O'Connell, Stephen Carroll, Michael Horowitz, Allan Abrahamese, and Paul Jamieson, "The Comparative Costs of Allowing Consumer Choice for Auto Insurance in All Fifty States," *Maryland Law Review* 55:1 (1996), 160-222; and Joint Economic Committee, U.S. Congress, "Auto Choice: Impact on Cities and the Poor," March 1998.

would be logical for the U.S. Department of Transportation to conduct or fund such a study as part of the implementation of the federal Access to Jobs initiative.

IV. TESTING MISMATCH: FIVE CITY PROFILES

While no empirical test has been conducted on the above variables to capture the diversities in spatial mismatch, we believe that existing research allows us to make a preliminary assessment of how some cities fare when it comes to providing job access to the poor. The following section will briefly examine five metropolitan areas -- Atlanta, Milwaukee, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles -- and their demographic trends, poverty patterns, labor market growth, and transportation systems. Each city profile will illustrate how the four aforementioned variables -- along with other contributing factors -- affect the degree of spatial mismatch in the metropolitan area. The unique combination of factors in each of these cities call for different local policy solutions.

This study does not perform an empirical analysis and hence cannot quantitatively “rank” the profiled cities by their magnitude of mismatch. However, the following narrative analysis is intended to show that some metropolitan areas have more significant transportation-related problems than others, which argues for targeted intervention of federal resources to the most severe cases. Each of these five metropolitan areas exemplify qualitatively different “types” of spatial mismatch. The sample is limited to cities with large populations (all have metropolitan populations over 2 million except Milwaukee). This is due to the fact that larger cities have a far greater share of the nation’s welfare caseload and tend to be marked by some spatial mismatch; while smaller cities, as supported by empirical and observable evidence, have a relative absence of mismatch.

Atlanta: The Consequences of Sprawl

Metropolitan Atlanta -- hypersegregated, experiencing phenomenal suburban growth, and having what some find to be a “total dependence on the automobile,”⁴¹ -- would be one of the nation’s most severe cases of spatial mismatch under the proposed index.

The exodus of jobs and people to the suburbs has occurred on a massive scale in Atlanta. The city’s share of regional employment has dropped from 55% in 1970 to 29% in 1990. In 1960, 40% of metropolitan area residents lived in the city of Atlanta; in 1996, only 11.6% lived there. As a result, an Atlantan’s average commute has stretched to 30 miles a day -- a longer average ride to work than that of any other metropolitan area in the country. The distance to work is hardly surprising when one considers that the Atlanta Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) now spreads across 20 counties, whose 1997 population density ranged from 3,045 persons per square mile in the city of Atlanta to only 224 persons per square mile in outlying areas.⁴² As a result, a recent regional study estimated that every resident loses the equivalent of one day per

⁴¹ “Buses Don’t Transport Crime,” editorial, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, May 14, 1998, 14A.

⁴² Rich and Coughlin, 3-5 and Table 1.

year sitting in traffic.⁴³

Suburban job growth has centered on the northern counties of the MSA, which are now among the fastest growing in the country.⁴⁴ When jobs are broken down by income and skill level, entry-level jobs seem to be more plentiful in the outer-ring northern suburbs, likely because of a shortage of available applicants.⁴⁵ Racial segregation in both city and suburb has meant that the benefits of Atlanta's explosive growth are racially skewed. The economically booming northern suburbs are overwhelmingly white. While many African Americans also have suburbanized, most have migrated to less job-rich suburban areas in the southern half of the MSA. The 1990 Census recorded that 65% of the region's whites and 18% of the region's blacks lived in the northern suburbs; 48% of the region's blacks lived in the southern suburbs but only 28% of the region's whites did.⁴⁶

As in other U.S. cities, the exodus to the suburbs by whites has resulted in an increased concentration of poor and minority residents in the central city. While the MSA is 70% white, the city of Atlanta is 70% black.⁴⁷ Despite the concentration of poverty in the city, suburbanization and metropolitan growth has changed the spatial pattern of poverty in the Atlanta area. One 1997 estimate found that about four out of ten welfare households in the MSA are located outside the City of Atlanta.⁴⁸ It appears that this is partly the result of the inclusion of rural, poorer counties into the MSA because of rapid post-1980 job growth. Yet it also stems from an increased incidence of poverty in Atlanta's inner-ring suburbs, including parts of affluent Cobb County.

Because of suburban resistance to the expansion of urban public transit, Atlanta's public transportation system -- known as MARTA -- has not been able to keep pace with suburban growth. As a result, MARTA's trains and buses cover Fulton County (where the city of Atlanta is located), DeKalb County (the inner-ring suburban county immediately to the east), and a tiny portion of Clayton County (immediately south of the city of Atlanta). Cobb County is the only other area with its own bus system, but these run between suburbs with only an occasional link to MARTA routes. There are some commuter buses that go from the suburbs to downtown, but these buses do not carry passengers on their return trip to the suburbs. Interestingly, public sentiment towards the expansion and regionalization of the public transit system may be

⁴³ "Survey Confirms Voters Want Regional Transit," editorial, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, June 30, 1998, 8A.

⁴⁴ Keith Ihlanfeldt, "The Spatial Mismatch Between Jobs and Residential Locations Within Urban Areas," *Cityscape* 1:1 (1993), 225; Rich and Coughlin 4.

⁴⁵ Rich and Coughlin, Map 8.

⁴⁶ Ihlanfeldt, "Information on the Spatial Distribution of Job Opportunities within Metropolitan Areas," 224.

⁴⁷ Rich and Coughlin, 6.

⁴⁸ Rich and Coughlin, 7. The authors noted that these suburban welfare cases were often found in "relatively large clusters, forming a pattern similar to the markings on the face of a clock, running from about 2 o'clock to 10 o'clock."

growing more favorable. This is not due to reverse commute problems from the central city, but to the fact that the traffic gridlock in the suburbs is becoming intolerable.⁴⁹

The current state of public transportation in the Atlanta MSA means that there is *only one* public transit option – created by a link between Cobb County’s bus system and MARTA – for travel from the city or the southern suburbs to the job-rich “edge city” of Marietta/Smyrna (an area that gained nearly 3,000 entry level jobs between 1990 and 1993). There are *no* public transit options for travel between downtown and another quickly-growing suburban job center, Norcross (an area that gained over 3,700 jobs between 1990 and 1993).⁵⁰ Transportation problems may be bad for middle-class suburban Atlantans, but they appear to be even worse for low-income central city residents. Although Atlanta is a metropolitan area where 90% of households own at least one car, the percentage of low-income households who own cars is estimated to be dramatically lower. Minority households of all incomes have lower car ownership rates; the 1990 Census found that 39% of black households in the City of Atlanta had no vehicle available for use by household members.⁵¹

⁴⁹ The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* recently conducted a poll that found that 72% of metropolitan residents supported a new unified bus and rail system that would serve the entire metropolitan area, and that the expansion of public transit was the most popular solution to metropolitan transportation problems. However, MARTA continues to suffer from image problems that may be largely connected to suburbanites’ perceptions of it as a central city service. One Cobb County resident thought MARTA “unsafe,” saying that “I try not to go anywhere near Atlanta just because of all the fear of getting killed or robbed,” but “it would be good for the train to go out farther [into Cobb County].” David Goldberg, “Poll Says Suburbanites Aren’t Hostile to MARTA,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, June 28, 1998, E7.

⁵⁰ Ihlanfeldt 1997, 225 (Table 2).

⁵¹ 1990 National Personal Transportation Survey *Urban Travel Patterns*, Table 6-3; 1990 Census of Population and Housing, STF 3A.

Hypersegregated residential patterns and inadequate transportation options, combined with uncontrolled sprawl, mean that entry-level jobs are plentiful and better-paying in the northern suburbs, yet low-income minorities cannot reach them easily. A 1996 survey of Atlanta MSA fast-food restaurants showed that wages increased the further one traveled from the central city, but the more distant restaurants experienced increased difficulty in finding employees and had fewer walk-in inquiries by job-seekers.⁵²

The programs that serve the poor and that are tasked with putting thousands of welfare recipients to work have a geographic scope that does not recognize the metropolitan nature of Atlanta's growth. The State of Georgia has devolved welfare administration to the county level, but in the 20-county Atlanta MSA, little to no inter-county coordination of service delivery -- especially around transportation -- has occurred.

As Ihlanfeldt and David Sjoquist have noted, "the spatial features of Atlanta are strongly consistent with the assumptions underlying the [spatial mismatch hypothesis]" as defined by Kain and others -- a majority black central city, high rates of segregation, and high rates of entry-level job decentralization.⁵³ The explosive growth of the Atlanta metropolitan area has amplified the effects of these factors, and has meant that even a relatively young public transit system is grossly inadequate in linking low-income residents to a significant number of jobs. Metropolitan growth and the newness of some of the region's major employment areas also seem to contribute to the fact that low-income workers may not be aware of the best places to seek a job.

It seems that Atlanta's spatial mismatch is exacerbated -- and its welfare-to-work challenges made more serious -- because of the rapid and uncontrolled growth of the metropolitan area. Transportation services, job placement agencies, and human services providers have not been able to keep up with the sprawl of economic activity in the Atlanta MSA, and as a result welfare recipients -- and low-income workers in general -- continue to be disconnected from the marketplace.

⁵² Ihlanfeldt and Young, 697 (Table 1). Atlanta is one of the few metropolitan areas with existing studies specifically about the quality of labor market information. Keith Ihlanfeldt of Georgia State University recently investigated the knowledge that people have of the spatial distribution of low-skilled jobs in the Atlanta MSA. He found that both blacks and whites had poor information about relative job-richness of six different employment centers in the MSA, although blacks were worse informed than whites. Interestingly, Ihlanfeldt also found that "people living in underclass neighborhoods are not poorly informed relative to those living outside of those areas" (Ihlanfeldt 1997, 220).

⁵³ "The Geographic Mismatch Between Jobs and Housing," 23.

Milwaukee: City vs. Suburb

While the geographic magnitude of suburban sprawl defines some cities' spatial mismatch, the administrative and political tensions between the central city and suburbs exacerbate patterns of others' geographic mismatch. Milwaukee is a prime example of this. While not among the largest metropolitan areas in the country (the 1996 MSA population was just under 1.5 million⁵⁴), Milwaukee registers high on our scale of mismatch because of the intensity of the mismatch-inducing characteristics of the metropolitan area, many of which appear to be products of long-standing political, economic, and racial divisions between the central city and the surrounding suburbs.

During the past fifty years, the size of Milwaukee's metropolitan area population has changed little, but its geographic distribution has changed dramatically. In 1950, the City of Milwaukee contained 73% of the population in the metropolitan area. In 1996, it contained less than 41%. Between 1970 and 1990, the number of metropolitan area residents living in high poverty census tracts increased 713%.⁵⁵ The metropolitan area is highly segregated: 97% of MSA African Americans reside within the City of Milwaukee, over two-thirds of all whites reside outside the city.⁵⁶

Milwaukee has a disproportionately large welfare caseload, even after a decade of state and federal welfare reforms that contributed to an 80% decline in the State of Wisconsin's welfare rolls since 1993.⁵⁷ Milwaukee's rate of caseload decline has been only 72% of the State's, however, and by March 1998 Milwaukee County was home to almost 86% of the State's welfare caseload.⁵⁸ In the City of Milwaukee, 81% of these welfare recipients are concentrated in ten ZIP codes.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ "The Economic State of Milwaukee," Table 1.3.

⁵⁵ "The Economic State of Milwaukee," Tables 1.7 and 4.12.

⁵⁶ Robert Drago, "Jobs, Skills, and Discrimination: An Analysis of Milwaukee's Inner City and Metro Areas," Employment and Training Institute, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

⁵⁷ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.

⁵⁸ Katz and Carnevale.

⁵⁹ John Pawasarat, "Initial Findings on Mobility and Employment of Public Assistance Recipients on Milwaukee County and Factors Relating to Changes in W-2 Regions Over Time," Employment and Training Institute, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, April 1997, 15.

Employment in all sectors of Milwaukee's economy has declined in the central city and grown exponentially in the major suburban counties (Washington, Ozaukee, and Waukesha). Unlike some other larger cities at the center of more booming regional economies, Milwaukee does not have nearly enough entry-level job opportunities within the city limits to offset the number of center city residents seeking jobs. The suburban counties have four times as many full-time openings as the poorer city neighborhoods, and three times as many jobs as Milwaukee County (the city and inner suburbs) as a whole.⁶⁰

For low-income residents who *do* manage to find nearby jobs, they find that they earn less than those who travel farther for employment. Studies of Milwaukee's labor market have shown that "distance traveled [to work] related directly to hourly wages with 42 percent of workers earning \$4.00-4.99 an hour employed less than 2 miles from their homes compared to 14 percent of workers earning \$8.00 or more per hour."⁶¹ This correlation is underscored by the fact that most Milwaukee welfare recipients who recently made the transition from welfare to work earn less than they would have on welfare. A December 1996 survey of recipients who had left the rolls two months before found that over 60% were making less than the equivalent of \$10,000 per year, and that almost 50% were making less than \$5,000 per year. Only 10% of the cases had sustained earnings above the poverty level in both the fourth quarter of 1996 and the first quarter of 1997.⁶²

While a majority of Milwaukee's central city working poor have jobs close to home, they are not forced to stay within a narrow geographic range because of limited transportation options. Many low-income people have access to cars, and many inner-city residents already drive to work. Owning a car in Milwaukee may be more affordable than in other cities, partly because car insurance is not required by law in Wisconsin. Car insurance requirements may or may not be the reason that central city car ownership in Milwaukee is high. A 1993 survey of central city low-income residents found that 80% of employed persons had a car available to them, and that 43% of unemployed persons (all of whom had expressed an interest in working) had an available car. In both categories the rate of availability was higher for men than women.⁶³

However, despite the higher percentage of car availability among this city's low-income population, car usage remains low due to administrative obstacles imposed by local courts. Wisconsin state law allows courts to penalize minor offenses -- both traffic- and *non*-traffic related -- by restricting or revoking driver's licenses. As a result, one survey found that 60% of Milwaukee's unemployed job seekers do not have valid

⁶⁰ John Pawasarat and Lois M. Quinn, "Integrating Milwaukee County AFDC Recipients into the Local Labor Market," Employment and Training Institute, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, November 1995, 15.

⁶¹ Pawasarat, "Initial Findings," iv.

⁶² Pawasarat, "Employment and Earnings of Milwaukee County Single Parent AFDC Families: Establishing Benchmarks for Measuring Employment Outcomes Under W-2," Employment and Training Institute, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1997, Graph 1.

⁶³ Lois M. Quinn and Linda Hawkins, "Profile of Central City Milwaukee Labor Force Participants: Fall 1993 Household Survey," Employment and Training Institute, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 10.

licenses.⁶⁴ Half of center city teenagers have a penalty on their license. In addition, the Milwaukee public schools recently cut summer driver education programs; the number of licensed teen drivers in the city has since fallen by half. Even if low-income workers own cars, many of them cannot legally drive them.

Mobility in the Milwaukee MSA also suffers because of a highly disjointed public transit system that has only limited coverage in the job-rich suburban counties. Milwaukee County's bus system has relatively high ridership for a city of its size and is an efficient system for short-distance travel within the city. However, its buses stop at the county line. The other four counties in the MSA run their own bus services but do not coordinate their regular routes with Milwaukee County's buses. During the past decade, public and private entities have attempted to bridge the public transportation gap between city and suburb through several supplementary transportation projects such as reverse commute vans and buses, vanpools and rideshare programs, and use of Amtrak rail service. Low-income riders are not always targeted by these programs. Among those programs that are aimed at serving inner-city populations, per-ride costs have often been extremely high and the geographic range of service has been limited.⁶⁵

The widespread driver's license problems and the lack of coordination between city and suburban bus systems indicate that administrative as well as geographic barriers limit the job access of low-income Milwaukee residents. These administrative problems seem to be a symptom of a larger disjunction between city and suburban institutions in the Milwaukee MSA. A long series of battles over issues ranging from sewer systems to light rail lines has left city and suburban interests wary of one another and reluctant to cooperate on systemic changes that might mitigate the low-income transportation problem. As nearly all MSA blacks live in the city, and most of the whites outside it, the rift between city and suburb takes on racial overtones. It would be difficult to empirically measure the degree to which racial discrimination plays a role in administrative decisions affecting low-income (and minority) mobility in the Milwaukee metropolitan area. Yet it is clear that a history of racial discrimination and white flight causes Milwaukee's metropolitan leaders to take a pessimistic approach to the feasibility of city-suburban cooperation. As a result, the city's welfare reform transportation efforts continue to focus on supplementary transportation programs and avoid the more difficult battles for systemic change in public transit delivery.

Chicago: Suburbs Are Not Monolithic

Like Milwaukee, Chicago is an older, highly segregated Midwestern city hit hard by the industrial decline and residential suburbanization of the past decades. However, the Chicago metropolitan area is one of much greater size and wealth. While it is experiencing exurban job growth and geographic and economic sprawl at a rate nearly comparable to Atlanta's, Chicago retains a great deal of economic vitality and job

⁶⁴ Pawasarat, "Survey of Central City Milwaukee Job Seekers: Fall 1995," Employment and Training Institute, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Table 3.

⁶⁵ Center on Wisconsin Strategy, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

opportunity within the city limits, particularly in its central business district. The older, transit-accessible suburbs of Chicago appear to have a good number of entry-level job openings.⁶⁶ Chicago also has a mature, multi-modal, and regional public transportation system.⁶⁷

For these reasons, Chicago's spatial mismatch (as defined by our proposed index) may not be as severe as that of Atlanta and Milwaukee. The job access challenge in Chicago may have less to do with transportation and more to do with low-income minority residents being so isolated in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty that they lack good information about job opportunities, do not have adequate levels of education or training, or lack the support services -- like child care -- that allow them to go to work.

However, the sheer size of the metropolitan area means that adequate transportation services are still important to ensuring job access for Chicago's low-income residents. The existing labor market patterns and transit infrastructure indicate that it may be easier to narrow the low-income transportation gap without an enormous outlay of new resources. There may be some fruitful opportunities for targeted and transportation-oriented job access strategies in Chicago. These opportunities become evident when we cease to treat Chicago's suburbs as a monolithic entity and differentiate between the job accessibility of inner ring and outer ring employers. Chicago's welfare reform implementers are beginning to do this, and their job placement efforts generally take into account feasible commuting times from central city neighborhoods. This pragmatic approach is essential in very large metropolitan areas like Chicago.

One recent survey found that nearly 80% of Chicago's MSA residents drove to work.⁶⁸ The car dependency of such a transit-rich metropolitan area results in part from the fact that suburban employment centers have spread far beyond the reach of Chicago's mass transit systems. Between 1990 and 1996, while the population of Cook County (containing Chicago and the older suburbs) declined slightly, all of the suburban counties increased in population and jobs. The outer-ring suburban Kane and Will Counties grew about 16% and 19%, respectively, during this six-year period.⁶⁹ There are only nine regional public transit stops -- all commuter rail -- in the two counties combined.⁷⁰ Public transit simply is not a realistic commuting option for most Chicago exurban residents, and a recent survey found that while 28% of city residents take public transportation to work, less than 10% of outer suburban residents do.⁷¹

⁶⁶ Urban Transportation Center, University of Illinois-Chicago.

⁶⁷ Chicago's Regional Transit Authority -- comprised of the CTA, Metra commuter rail, and PACE suburban buses -- is the second largest in the country (American Public Transit Association, www.apta.com/pubs/stats/profile/35lgeag.htm).

⁶⁸ Metropolitan Chicago Information Center, Community Demographics Study, <http://www.mcic.org/commfacts/dsurvey.html>.

⁶⁹ 1990-1996 County Population Estimates, Center for Governmental Studies, Northern Illinois University.

⁷⁰ Metra Rail System Map.

⁷¹ MCIC Community Demographics Study.

The low-income transportation problem seems almost insurmountable in Chicago's exurban areas. Many places of employment are scattered in ways that make them accessible only by car, and a number of exurban employers may provide part-time jobs with few or no benefits. Parents moving from welfare to work may find that the round-trip commute is nearly as long as their four- to six-hour work shift. With these barriers, the opportunity costs of taking an exurban job can outweigh any added benefits of suburban employment; central city residents are better off searching for jobs closer to home.

This does not mean that suburban-oriented job placement strategies should be abandoned, however. Rather than pursue job placement strategies that are only driven by demand, and thus attempt to link central city workers to exurban employers, it may be easier to overcome spatial mismatch if one examines opportunities in closer-in suburban areas. Chicago's older suburbs are more likely to include corridors served by public transit and the commuting times -- both for fixed-route transit and car and van services -- are within a practical range. There also is considerable, and perhaps overlooked, entry-level job richness in the inner suburbs of Chicago. Unlike part-time jobs on the exurban corporate campuses, malls, or manufacturing facilities, a good amount of inner suburban job opportunities may be with small- to medium-sized businesses that offer full-time work with benefits.

The story of one transportation-focused job placement organization in Chicago demonstrates how a focus on the resources of the inner suburbs can produce positive job placement outcomes. Its story also underscores the way in which transportation strategies should be linked to other job access measures in order to overcome spatial mismatch.

Suburban Job-Link (SJL) places about 450 workers per year in Chicago's O'Hare Airport industrial area and the neighboring suburbs. SJL is highly targeted in its recruitment, tapping workers who live within a three-block radius of a major transportation corridor running through North Lawndale, a minority neighborhood of concentrated poverty on Chicago's West Side. The organization geographically limits itself in its job placements as well -- none of them are more than an hour's commute from North Lawndale. SJL runs buses and vans from the city at the start of each shift, and the suburban bus system, PACE, takes the workers home. This joint transportation strategy reduces capital costs, and it is made possible by the fact that the geographic targeting of workers and jobs creates a critical mass of ridership that makes the public transit agency willing to participate.

The focus at SJL is on well-paying, full-time jobs that are located in closer-in suburban employment clusters easily serviced by mass transit. It only uses employers that are located a reasonable commuting distance from the central city and in clusters, like industrial parks. Despite this targeting, it still faces some difficulties in providing transportation services that completely bridge the spatial mismatch. The start times of jobs -- even ones on the same shift -- vary widely. SJL has had to incorporate smaller buses during off-peak hours to accommodate workers whose shifts end earlier or later than usual. The program also

recognizes that many workers need assistance with more than transportation, and it offers one-week job readiness training courses to participants in suburban training centers and assistance with the job search.

It is easy for a welfare-to-work effort to measure success in terms of *any* job placement, regardless of location or wage. This approach could cause us to forget to differentiate between the quality of exurban job placements and inner suburban placements in a place like Chicago. SJL's success demonstrates that a place-focused approach to job placement can create a system that is more sustainable for both the employer and the recipient. It also cautions program implementers from relying solely on a demand-driven and corporate-focused welfare to work effort. This strategy may overlook small- to medium-sized employers who are located closer to central cities.⁷²

Philadelphia: High Poverty and Slow Growth

Philadelphia is an older, formerly industrial, very large, and racially segregated metropolitan area. It is an area marked by high poverty and slow job growth, which presents a serious problem when an estimated 65,000 welfare recipients will need to find jobs over the next few years.⁷³ While Philadelphia does not appear to have the large-scale spatial mismatch problems of a metropolitan area like Atlanta, the city does experience both a job gap and a transportation gap. Philadelphia is a compelling example of how – even with an extensive central public transit system – micro-level transportation barriers as well as limited city-to-suburb routes pose a tremendous challenge to low-income job access.

The City of Philadelphia has experienced drastic declines in population; the city now numbers less than 1.6 million people, down 25% from its peak in 1950 and 6% from 1980. African Americans make up 40% of the city's population but only a small fraction of the suburban population.⁷⁴ Over 240,000 Philadelphia MSA residents live in 70 high-poverty census tracts; 143,000 of this group are African American, and nearly 60,000 are Hispanic.⁷⁵

Many parts of Philadelphia's suburban counties are rich in jobs and in personal wealth, although there are some declining blue-collar suburbs, such as Chester, Pennsylvania and Camden, New Jersey, whose populations are desperately poor. Most of the high-unemployment areas in the MSA cluster inside the Philadelphia city limits, although there are pockets of severe unemployment in these and other industrial

⁷² Smaller businesses also may be easy to overlook because they are rarely organized in employer coalitions that would increase their visibility with job placement agencies. In the absence of organized small-employer groups, community-based organizations can be effective intermediaries between job placement agencies and small employers, identifying job opportunities and providing referrals.

⁷³ "Greater Philadelphia Works: Proposed Plan for the Expenditure of the Federal Welfare to Work Grant," Private Industry Council of Philadelphia, June 1998, 3.

⁷⁴ Center for Greater Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania. African Americans make up 3% of the population in Bucks County, 6% in Chester County, and 11% in the more predominantly blue-collar Delaware County.

⁷⁵ Jargowsky, 78.

suburbs elsewhere in the region.⁷⁶

The characteristic that sets Philadelphia apart from other metropolitan areas with large low-income populations seems to be its slow job growth. There was barely an increase in the total establishment employment in the MSA between 1986 and 1995.⁷⁷ The robust economy has accelerated the rate of growth in recent years, although net job growth increases are small for a MSA of this size. In addition, throughout recent years, jobs have continued to shift from the city to the suburbs. As one recent report noted, “over the last ten years, the city has lost almost 80,000 private sector jobs while the suburbs gained more than 175,000 jobs,” and today the City of Philadelphia only contains 30% of the region’s employment.⁷⁸ Commutes from the city to the suburbs increased by 40% during the 1980s.⁷⁹

Philadelphia has a mature and extensive regional public transportation system, SEPTA, yet most of its services facilitate travel within the city or from suburb to city. SEPTA’s reverse commute services are limited, despite the high number of city-to-suburb commuters. The demand for these services is evidenced by the crowds who fill the few buses running from downtown to one of the largest suburban employment centers, King of Prussia.

Philadelphians, and low-income Philadelphians in particular, crowd onto these buses because many of them have no other transportation options. The city has the second-lowest rate of car ownership in the country: 0.30 cars per capita. This rate is less than half of that of the suburbs.⁸⁰ Astoundingly expensive car insurance rates -- precipitated by Pennsylvania insurance statutes and high rates of car theft and collisions in the city -- make it nearly impossible for a low-income person to afford an insured vehicle.⁸¹

A recent SEPTA strike made the transit dependency of low-income Philadelphia residents even more stark. Suburban employers found that many of their entry-level employees could not get to work; larger firms began to run shuttles from the city. Workers saw their one-hour commutes stretch to three hours, or had to

⁷⁶ Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission.

⁷⁷ Philadelphia City Planning Commission, “City Stats,” March 1997.

⁷⁸ “Greater Philadelphia Works,” 11.

⁷⁹ “The Philadelphia Collaborative’s Scale Site Initiative,” Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, April 1995, 4.

⁸⁰ Richard Voith, “Transportation Investments in the Philadelphia Metropolitan Area: Who Benefits? Who Pays? And What are the Consequences?” Working Paper No. 98-7, Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia, March 1998, 14.

⁸¹ Claimed injury rates also drive up the cost of insurance in Philadelphia. One estimate found that “in Philadelphia, the claimed injury rate is three and one-half times the average for the rest of the state [of Pennsylvania] -- more than 78 injury claims per 100 accidents” (Joint Economic Committee 7).

stay on for second shifts when other employees could not reach work on time.⁸²

With or without transit strikes, there are transportation gaps in the Philadelphia area that call for more flexible solutions than mass transit. Employers recognize these gaps, and in some instances subsidize services to remedy them. For example, one suburban employer created a bus route between their facility and Camden, New Jersey, where many of the company's low-income employees worked. The employer's aim in establishing the service was to convince the New Jersey transit system that there was sustainable demand for this service, and within a few months the transit agency instituted a bus service along the route. This story illustrates an observable trend among corporate employers that extends beyond Philadelphia: they do not usually provide additional transportation services, and, when they do, they see their services as short-term efforts that should eventually be supplanted by public transit.

While there is clearly a need for increased access to cars among low-income Philadelphians, mass transit-reliant solutions are more feasible in Philadelphia than in other places because of the patterns of job growth. Suburban jobs appear to cluster around transportation corridors more so than they do in some other large metropolitan areas; this could be related to the slower rate of job growth (and hence slower rate of suburbanization and sprawl), the maturity of the regional transportation system, or other factors.⁸³ This job clustering may make spatial mismatch relatively less severe than in other cities.

However, Philadelphia officials point out that there are "micro-issues" that often confound their efforts to improve transportation access for low-income people, despite the fact that the city has a well-supported public transit system and relatively less exurban growth than cities like Atlanta or Chicago. These barriers range from a lack of crosswalks or pedestrian bridges that could link a bus stop on one side of a busy eight-lane roadway to a mall full of employers on the other; to a corporate campus having very long driveways that are too narrow for a bus to navigate, so employees must walk from ½ a mile to a mile from the main road. In suburban job centers built for workers with cars, these micro-problems are too numerous to count and serve as physical and psychological barriers for low-income people traveling to suburban employment from the central city.

The welfare to work challenge -- and that of low-income job access in general -- is a daunting task in the Philadelphia MSA. There is a massive job gap between the tens of thousands of low-income job seekers and the inadequate number of entry-level jobs, city and suburban. However, many welfare recipients in Philadelphia need job readiness skills, child care services, and other supports before they can go to work.⁸⁴ The seriousness of these other needs as well as the patterns of job growth and public transit change the

⁸² Monica Yant, Kay Raftery, and Blair Clarkson, "With SEPTA Strike, Getting Out of the City is a Burden, Too," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 3, 1998.

⁸³ Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission.

⁸⁴ "Greater Philadelphia Works," 6.

dimensions of the transportation problem in Philadelphia.

Los Angeles: Decentralized Poverty, Multi-Ethnicity, and Job “Checkerboard”

It is not surprising that Los Angeles, the most traffic-congested metropolitan area in the United States, would have low-income transportation problems. Yet while it may have transportation barriers, we argue that it does not have severe spatial mismatch as defined by our proposed index. Having transportation problems but not spatial mismatch may seem contradictory, but there are three reasons why we feel this distinction should be made.

First, the city’s job growth patterns have created much more of a “checkerboard” pattern of job richness than is seen in other metropolitan areas, and many of these job-rich areas are transit-accessible.⁸⁵ Second, unlike the other four cities profiled in this study, Los Angeles does not have a central area of concentrated minority poverty, and it has a multiethnic population that is about 50% non-Hispanic white and only 8% African American.⁸⁶ Third, the size and scope of growth in Los Angeles changes the dimensions of the problem of transportation equity; some might argue that growth patterns make transportation a problem for nearly all people living in the Los Angeles MSA, regardless of income.

This third point is underscored when we examine the dimensions of the transportation infrastructure in Los Angeles. Although many people outside Los Angeles assume that it is a city without extensive public transportation, its county transit system has the third-largest number of annual unlinked passenger trips of any system in the country, ranking behind only New York and Chicago.⁸⁷ Its metropolitan transportation planning region is equal in size to the State of Ohio, covers six counties and 184 cities, and contains nearly half of California’s population. Seventeen separate public transit agencies serve the region, with nine of these agencies providing 98% of the existing public bus service. However, overall ridership has declined since the mid-1980s, and transit’s share of home-to-work commutes declined 12% between 1980 and 1990.⁸⁸

Despite the large public transit network in the Los Angeles MSA, the spread of job growth and residential patterns often extend far beyond the reach of reasonable commuting times on public transit. The recent decline in public transit commuting may be an indicator that the extensive suburban sprawl of the past 20 years make this option even less feasible than it had been in the past. Life in Los Angeles, for people of any income level, is extremely difficult without a car.

⁸⁵ Ong and Blumenberg, “Job Access Among Welfare Recipients,” 81 (Figure 1).

⁸⁶ “Setting: A Regional Snapshot,” *1998 Regional Transportation Plan*, Southern California Association of Governments, 3.3.

⁸⁷ American Public Transit Association.

⁸⁸ “Setting: A Regional Snapshot” 3.3; 3.6.2.

It is not surprising, then, that the rate of car accessibility among low-income people, even welfare recipients, is very high in Los Angeles. According to 1990 Census data, nearly 80% of Los Angeles public assistance recipients have at least one vehicle in their household.⁸⁹ A recent survey found that 65% of welfare recipients used a car as their usual mode of transportation; less than 27% rode public transit.⁹⁰ Less than 10% of working welfare recipients use public transportation to get to work.⁹¹ Even if low-income people do not have a car in their household, they may be more likely to participate in carpooling or informal jitney cab services provided by friends or neighbors. The high rate of car accessibility means that transportation is less of a barrier to obtaining and keeping a job. When formerly working welfare recipients were asked why they left their last place of employment, only 2% cited a lack of access to transportation as the reason.⁹²

The fact that low-income people can be more mobile in the Los Angeles MSA makes it disturbing to discover that low-income working people, on average, do not commute very far away from home. Paul Ong and Evelyn Blumenberg of UCLA recently found that the median commute distance for working welfare recipients was 7.5 miles, less than half of the average metropolitan commute distance of 16 miles. Low-income people are, in effect, confined to a smaller labor market area. This problem appears to be more severe for low-income blacks than Hispanics. The same study found that Hispanics of all income groups had an average commute time more or less consistent with non-Hispanic whites, while low-income blacks' commute times were markedly lower.⁹³

The limited geographic scope of low-income working patterns, particularly those of African Americans, indicates that things other than spatial mismatch are preventing employers from hiring workers from poor neighborhoods. Racial discrimination or lack of information could be factors in limiting job access.

There is evidence, however, that even if the geographic scope of low-income workers' job opportunities expanded, transportation to distant jobs might not be the key to self-sufficiency in metropolitan Los Angeles. Ong and Blumenberg's study found that wages did not increase the farther a low-skilled worker traveled from home. Because of out-of-pocket commuting expenses and the opportunity costs associated with the length of the commute, net wages effectively decline with distance. This finding may argue for more job creation closer to low-income neighborhoods, or for additional career training for new and incumbent

⁸⁹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990 Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS).

⁹⁰ 1997 Work Readiness Survey, California Department of Social Services.

⁹¹ 1990 PUMS.

⁹² 1997 Work Readiness Survey.

⁹³ 82, 84.

workers that could increase overall earnings.⁹⁴

In sum, Los Angeles experiences a set of demographic and economic patterns that challenge the definition of the low-income transportation problem and the dimensions of possible policy solutions. To assume Los Angeles is spatially mismatched is to misdiagnose the problem, and it could lead to the wrong policy prescription.

⁹⁴ 87-88.

V. POLICY APPROACHES

So far, this paper has attempted to better define spatial mismatch, identify the variables that might cause or correlate with this problem, and describe how spatial mismatch manifests itself in five representative metropolitan areas. Now we want to suggest a two-part approach to resolving this divide. The first centers around specific, immediate policy actions that respond to the job placement needs of welfare recipients but are structured in a way that is sustainable over time and helps alleviate job access problems in severely spatial mismatched urban areas. The second part consists of policy principles that could guide the long-term planning of low-income job access strategies in order to: (1) allow low-income people to have the same degree of mobility as middle-income people; and (2) reduce spatial mismatch through more sustainable metropolitan growth.

Five Governing Observations

There are five observations that inform both the short- and long-term policy recommendations of this paper. The first is that solving the low-income transportation problem is more complicated than it may seem at first. It often needs to be bundled in with other support services: the pilot programs with the largest participation rates have combined home-to-work transportation with other job access services, like work readiness and child care. Mass transit solutions also have to be very flexible. Planners have to take into account multiple start times for work shifts, emergency rides home, or other elements of the daily “trip chain” undertaken by low-income people, particularly mothers.

The second observation is that suburban job access strategies do not necessarily have to be in tension with central city revitalization. Policy makers and practitioners have tended to view the choice between urban community empowerment and suburban job access as an either-or proposition: policies must focus either on rebuilding a community’s economic infrastructure and creating jobs where low-income people now live, or concentrate on opening up the suburbs to low-income jobs and low-income housing. Two conclusions are sometimes implicit in the latter option: 1) the central city will never be the employment center it once was and that policy makers should cease trying to make it one, and 2) as soon as people obtain good jobs in the suburbs, they will move out of the inner city.

These conclusions do not necessarily have to be true; the two options – community empowerment and suburban job access -- can be complementary to one another. In the large cities of the 1990s, labor markets are metropolitan-wide. In most large urban areas, workers of all incomes make the reverse commute to the suburbs from the city; there is no valid argument for keeping low-income people from being able to do the same. Giving workers mobility to travel to and from suburban jobs increases family earnings and, in turn, increases the capital flowing back into central city neighborhoods. Some families with increased earnings may well move out of the neighborhood, and they have the right to do so. That does not mean that all families will move; many might stay, particularly if the overall health of their neighborhood improves.

Suburban job access can, in effect, be a mechanism for urban community reinvestment.

The third observation is that job suburbanization -- and “exurban”-ization -- should not be taken for granted. Suburbs vary widely in their degree of accessibility to the central city and in the quality of their low-wage employment. Low-income job access programs should not be demand-driven, placing workers in jobs regardless of the distance from the city or of whether the quality of the wage outweighs the opportunity costs of the commute. Such strategies reward employers who locate in exurban areas and might not otherwise be able to find a low-wage workforce. They also penalize low-income city residents who must endure long commutes for what are sometimes insecure jobs. Policy implementers need to be more aware of the perverse incentives for continued suburban sprawl created by job placement strategies that do not distinguish between inner ring and outer ring suburbs. These administrators should target their efforts to jobs in suburbs that are closer in and more transit accessible.

This also can serve as an added incentive for employers – both large and small – to move their facilities closer in towards the center of the metropolitan area. Some companies are already beginning to do this in order to be closer to their low-wage workforce; job placement agencies need to encourage this trend.

The fourth observation is connected to the third, and it is that policy makers and program implementers must distinguish among employers as well as among employer locations. Since the passage of welfare reform, national leaders and the media have focused much attention upon large corporations who have hired hundreds, even thousands, of low-income people coming off the welfare rolls. These numbers are remarkable, and large corporate employers clearly are responsible for assisting many former welfare recipients by hiring, training and providing additional services to ease their transition into the workplace.⁹⁵ Yet, beyond these statistics, we find that some of the jobs offered to welfare recipients by large employers may be part-time or lack full benefits. The altruistic intentions of the large corporations should not be dismissed, and large employers may generally pay better and have more formal (and perhaps less discriminatory) hiring measures than small or medium-sized companies. However, the trend among some large corporate employers towards part-time and low-benefit work is an issue that program implementers must carefully consider when placing low-income individuals in jobs.

More important to this paper’s argument, corporate campuses also tend to be suburban, if not exurban, and beyond the reach of public transit. The job quality problem might sometimes correlate with the employer location problem, and this correlation may strengthen the argument for placing low-income people in jobs closer to the central city and to established transit networks.

⁹⁵ Hiring and supporting welfare recipients is proving to be a benefit for some employers as well. Corporate employers also are finding that welfare recipients have higher job retention rates than other entry-level employees, perhaps because they are “desperate for work” (Judith Havemann and Barbara Vobejda, “Triumph and Trials In Welfare to Work; Sprint Has Success; Path Still Difficult,” *Washington Post*, May 27, 1998, A1).

Last, low-income transportation solutions need to reflect the reality of the 1990s urban marketplace. Transportation initiatives should aim not to create “special” programs for the inner-city poor, but to enact both incremental and systemic changes that create transportation equity for low-income people. We are not arguing for special treatment -- just for the leveling of the playing field. Middle-income white people, whether in the city or in the suburbs, usually can choose among a number of transportation options. They usually drive their cars, but they may also live near a commuter rail line, a subway, or a bus stop. If they do not live or work near mass transit, they would likely be able to move to a home near public transit, or choose a transit-accessible job. Low-income minorities do not have this sort of mobility. They have less choice in where they live or where they work, and they often lack the same degree of choice in transportation. Low-income transportation policies, for both the short and long term, need to make transportation equity their benchmark of success.

Imbedded in this recommendation is the understanding that these transportation policy solutions must be multi-modal. Policy makers should not expect low-income people to rely solely on public transit if middle-income people do not have to. Public policies should not discourage low-income car ownership -- especially as U.S. metropolitan areas have grown to the degree that many entry-level jobs are transit-inaccessible -- while they facilitate the car-based commute of the vast majority of metropolitan middle- and upper-income workers.

Federal Responsibilities in the Short Term

This paper's short term policy recommendations focus largely on the Access to Jobs program. Even in the context of the ticking welfare clock, there are steps policy makers at the federal level and policy implementers at the state and local level can take that both mitigate short term job access problems and create a sustainable infrastructure that diminishes the effects of spatial mismatch. Access to Jobs, if targeted effectively, may be able to do this.

The regulation-writing and grantmaking process for this program provides federal policy makers with many opportunities to put the principles implied by the proposed spatial mismatch index into action. There are four specific considerations we recommend federal officials make as they design and implement this new program:

1. *Target funds to the places with the most severe problems.*

Our evidence has indicated that the urban low-income transportation gap does not exist in small- to medium-sized metropolitan areas to the extent that it does in larger ones. Even among larger cities, some may experience less severe spatial mismatch and have job access problems that have more to do with racial discrimination or bad labor market information than with a lack of mobility. Access to Jobs will be most effective if it focuses on allocating larger grants to larger places where there is concentrated inner-city poverty, extensive job suburbanization, and inadequate transportation options spanning the spatial gap between workers and employers.

2. *Focus on sustainability and real metropolitan coordination.*

Proof of collaboration among public, private, and non-profit entities throughout a metropolitan area is a requirement for Access to Jobs funding.⁹⁶ Yet, regardless of the amount of collaboration involved, local programs will not realize their full potential if they only create supplementary transit services that take welfare recipients to far-flung suburban jobs without an eye to the opportunity costs of the commute or the institutional sustainability of the service. Local programs also will not prove to be effective unless they take into account the particular characteristics -- labor market patterns, degree of concentrated poverty, extent of transit, rate of car ownership -- of their metropolitan area. The Access to Jobs funding should reward applicants who look beyond the five years of this program and strive to create sustainable investments that integrate a variety of low-income transportation measures -- both mass transit and car-based transportation -- into their larger regional transportation strategy.

⁹⁶ "The eligible access to jobs projects funded under this section shall be part of a coordinated public transit-human services transportation planning process." PL 105-178, 3037(I)(2).

3. *Lead by example.*

The U.S. Department of Transportation and other federal agencies participating in the welfare to work effort need to encourage sustainable and coordinated job access strategies by making larger federal transportation and metropolitan policies more responsive to the problem of spatial mismatch and the needs of low-income workers. Low-income job access needs to be an integrated part of federal urban transportation policy, not just a side issue. Federal officials should consider measures such as incorporating “job access” requirements into the criteria for the recertification of Metropolitan Planning Organizations. Federal agencies also should not hesitate to enforce more seamless coordination among multiple transit agencies in metropolitan areas where buses stop at the city and county line. These sorts of disjointed systems pose a serious threat to low-income mobility and transit equity, and they may even raise civil rights questions. Measures like these would force local transportation planners to show demonstrable success in supporting the mobility of low-income people in order to receive continued federal funding.

4. *Learn.*

The Access to Jobs provision, as written, does not require a formal, extra-governmental evaluation.⁹⁷ The inclusion of a more extensive and rigorous evaluatory component is essential. Today’s robust national economy provides us with a rare opportunity to learn what the most effective measures might be to remedy spatial mismatch. There are more entry-level jobs in both our nation’s central cities and in their suburbs, a trend that reduces the effects of spatial mismatch by bringing jobs closer to where low-income people live.⁹⁸ While former welfare recipients and other low-income workers continue to face huge challenges in finding and keeping jobs, the current job richness in many metropolitan areas creates job access opportunities that might not otherwise exist. For example, there is evidence that suburban employers now facing low-income labor shortages might be more willing to subsidize transportation services for their workers (although we sense that private employers generally believe that transportation should not be their responsibility).

As we noted at the beginning of this study, designers of low-income transportation programs need more guidance about what might be the most effective programmatic models and what should be their benchmarks for success. Federal officials need to take advantage of the flexibility afforded by the healthy economy to test various low-income transportation strategies and determine a set of performance standards that these programs should strive to attain.

Federal agencies also need to provide localities with better tools to determine what programs would

⁹⁷ The law requires a review of the program by the General Accounting Office “beginning 6 months after the date of enactment of this Act, and every 6 months thereafter”; the Comptroller General will then submit a report to Congress (3037[k][1]).

⁹⁸ In his recent inter-city study of spatial mismatch, Bruce Weinberg found that “an increase in the fraction of jobs located in the central city raises black employment rates relative to whites” (29-30).

work best in their metropolitan area. At the moment, it is expensive and labor-intensive to perform an empirical study that maps the poverty patterns, labor market trends, and transit opportunities in a particular area. Unless there are local researchers willing to produce a study of these characteristics, metropolitan areas have little to guide their program planning other than observations and instinct. The variables used in case studies may vary from place to place, so that it becomes difficult to compare metropolitan areas or place them on a scale of spatial mismatch. Researchers must obtain their raw data from federal, state, and local sources and often must disaggregate statistics in order to determine the precise location of jobs and people.

Federal officials can do much to rectify these problems through a series of simple improvements to federal information infrastructure. For example, federal information about public assistance receipt and entry-level job openings could be disaggregated to a microlevel -- such as ZIP code -- more useful to local policy implementers. Agencies appear to be taking steps towards doing this,⁹⁹ but more must be done to make this data useful for the practitioner as well as the academic. Posting this data on the internet in an interactive format might be one way to increase its accessibility.

Last, federal agencies should consider using some of their resources to conduct a comparative study of metropolitan spatial mismatch. This paper has proposed a set of factors whose empirical measurement might create an index of spatial mismatch against which cities could be compared. This set of variables would need to be refined and tested through a rigorous, multi-city study. We strongly recommend that, as part of the federal administration of the Access to Jobs program, the research and evaluatory components of the U.S. Department of Transportation conduct this survey.

State and Metropolitan Responsibilities in the Short Term

State and metropolitan officials also have responsibilities to design and implement programs in targeted, coordinated, and sustainable ways. The metropolitan applicants for Access to Jobs funds should keep the following three principles in mind:

1. Understand your problem.

Welfare reform is teaching local program implementers that they should not immediately assume that most entry-level jobs in their metropolitan area have suburbanized, and they should not conclude that they must augment existing public transit systems in order to serve low-income populations. In most places, the reality is a bit more complicated. Both of these facts may be true to some degree in every large metropolitan area; however, jumping to these conclusions everywhere may lead planners to overlook areas of job richness closer into the central city (particularly in replacement jobs) as well as opportunities to maximize existing

⁹⁹ For example, the proposed TANF regulations include state reporting requirements that place a ZIP code identifier with every welfare case (45 CFR Part 275.9).

mass transit resources (both fixed-route and other modes). Understanding the demographic and economic dimensions of a particular metropolitan area also can prevent local policy practitioners from mistaking another barrier for a transportation barrier. As this paper has shown, spatial mismatch is not found everywhere, and in some places there may be other, higher priority job access measures on which policy practitioners should focus their resources. The successful targeting of Access to Jobs is not dependent on decisions of federal agencies alone. Local leaders must honestly determine the severity of their transportation problem, tailor place-specific solutions that maximize existing infrastructure, and build a wide-ranging coalition to implement these strategies.

2. *Integrate.*

Local leaders must also take responsibility for creating low-income transportation programs that look beyond the five years of the Access to Jobs program. Localities can use short-term funding opportunities to leverage larger investments and more systemic changes in local transportation networks. They can accomplish this by treating low-income transportation strategies as an integral part of their metropolitan transportation plan. As we have mentioned before, it is ultimately less effective to think of low-income transportation strategies as supplemental programs that are ancillary to the larger mission of transportation planning. With or without actual incentives from the federal government, metropolitan areas need to recognize that low-income workers are not a special, dependent population but are an important piece of the metropolitan transportation system's consumer base (both for public and for private transit).

We do not advocate that metropolitan entities cease providing additional services to low-income people; we simply want to push for a change in local thinking, away from specialized (and eventually unsustainable) small programs and towards measures that consider low-income people an integral part of the metropolitan marketplace. Metropolitan transportation systems have failed low-income workers in many metropolitan areas by providing haphazard service that effectively disconnects poorer people from the metropolitan labor market. Local leaders now have an opportunity to remedy this inequity, and the steps taken to do so should be consistent with, and integrated into, the larger metropolitan plans for transportation access for people of all incomes.

3. *Prioritize job placement.*

Part of understanding the dimensions of spatial mismatch in a metropolitan area involves taking a more nuanced view of job suburbanization. As this paper has indicated, suburbs can be very different from one another and should not be considered a monolithic entity. Local planners should take a prioritized view of job placement guided by transportation accessibility and job quality. In some cities, for example, this sort of approach could consider the central city first, the inner suburbs second, job clusters near the airport area third, and only consider job placements in the exurbs as a last resort. While this pattern would vary from place to place, the universal lesson for policy implementers is that job placement should not be demand-

driven. Differentiating among job centers also means differentiating among types of employers and among the quality of the jobs being offered.

Taking this approach breaks down the historical tension between city and suburb, where anything in the interest of one has been perceived as not being in the interest of the other. It also lays the groundwork for long-term solutions that approach welfare-to-work and spatial mismatch as challenges connected to the problems of metropolitan growth.

Long Term Policy Recommendations for Federal, State, and Local Officials

The actions that make Access to Jobs and related transportation programs targeted, coordinated and sustainable should be only the first part of a longer and broader strategy. In the long term, policy makers and practitioners must keep three principles in mind:

1. *Link welfare-to-work and low-income job access strategies with efforts to reshape metropolitan growth.*

In the context of what we have learned about spatial mismatch, this alliance seems natural and essential. However, welfare reform implementation and metropolitan planning decisions usually occur in isolation from one another in large cities. Yet all of the problems they are tackling have the same roots: post-industrial economic realignment, job suburbanization, geographic income disparity and racial segregation, urban fiscal problems, public and private subsidization of exurban growth. Any city welfare caseworker or community-based organization trying to place a welfare parent has to operate within parameters created by structural changes. Any metropolitan planner has to tackle the consequences of urban poverty and suburban sprawl. In order to create job access and transportation equity in the future, these two groups of leaders must come to understand their common interests.

The connection between welfare reform and metropolitan growth -- and the severity of both problems in certain cities -- argues against a recipient-focused, “any placement will do” welfare-to-work strategy. Metropolitan place-based strategies even can be *more* effective in transitioning parents from welfare to work and in strengthening the economic health of the central city.

2. *Treat suburban job access measures as a community empowerment strategy.*

The realities of metropolitan economic growth also require a rethinking of how policy makers and program implementers approach central city community development in the long term. To date, many state- and federal-sponsored community development efforts (most recently the federal Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities initiative) have focused on increasing job opportunities within the inner city, rather than supporting employment outside of it. However, efforts to open up the suburbs to low-income employment and residence do not contradict the goals of community empowerment programs. Just as welfare-to-work programs and smart growth initiatives need to understand their common interests in order to enact successful long-term policies, community empowerment efforts need to better understand the forces of the metropolitan marketplace and acknowledge that increased job opportunities – wherever they may be located – can help bring economic health back to an impoverished central city neighborhood through increased family earnings.

3. *Recognize that spatial mismatch is not inevitable.*

In the long term, policy makers must cease thinking of low-income job access as an issue having to do with mobility. They should guide their planning with an eye to reducing the geographic divide itself and bringing jobs and people closer together. This can be done by controlling suburban sprawl through “smart-growth” approaches -- like sensible land use provisions that curb development at the outer edge of metropolitan development, steer governmental infrastructure resources away from undeveloped areas, and bring employment centers back into the central parts of a metropolitan area. It can be done if policy implementers stop rewarding employers who locate in the exurbs by subsidizing transportation for their low-wage workforce. It can occur if suburbs build more affordable housing. And it can happen if cities and inner suburbs help take away the barriers -- taxes, crime, and regulatory impediments -- that led employers to the outer suburbs in the first place.

4. *View low-income transportation in terms of transportation equity.*

Low income transportation programs will fail in the long run if they are crafted as “special” projects for a needy population. We agree that there must be new efforts to increase welfare parents’ access to transportation. But we should not think of these as “extra” services; their goal should be to match the job access of middle-class families. Policy makers and practitioners also should not impose a transit-dependent transportation program on the poor that ignores the fact that the vast majority of American workers must commute to their jobs by car. Strategies to increase car ownership among low-income people are essential to any effort aimed at increasing mobility among central city residents.

VI. CONCLUSION

The welfare reform transportation bind is focusing new attention and resources on the decades-old problem of spatial mismatch in many American cities. Yet policy makers rarely step back and consider how the welfare-to-work problem is connected to larger trends in metropolitan growth, and how, as a result, different metropolitan areas may experience varying degrees of this problem. In too many places, low-income transportation strategies are thought of as small initiatives separate from metropolitan transportation planning. Welfare-to-work efforts must learn from history and respond to the new calls for “smart growth” and systemic change. The welfare time limit clock is ticking, and policy practitioners reasonably argue that they must focus on the client before the system.

However, we *can* have short-term welfare-to-work transportation strategies that are better aware of metropolitan labor market trends and that are consistent and supportive of metropolitan smart growth and community empowerment. We also can use welfare-to-work as a catalyst for transportation planning that bridges the gaps between city and suburb -- and mainstreams welfare parents and low-income urban residents generally -- into the transportation and labor market networks of a metropolitan area.

This paper has shown three things: (1) why the low income transportation problem is much more severe in some cities and how this severity is linked to uncontrolled metropolitan growth; (2) how the response to this problem (at the federal, state, and local level) must be targeted to severely affected areas, must be coordinated across administrative boundaries in a way that reflects labor market realities, and must be sustainable; and (3) how the issues affecting welfare reform transportation efforts connect back to metropolitan growth trends.

Policy makers and program implementers must take a metropolitan, growth-conscious approach to low-income transportation initiatives. This will be the only way to ensure sustainability of these initiatives over the long term and keep them from becoming another short-lived social service program that does little to enact systemic change. The welfare-to-work effort can be a great opportunity for metropolitan areas to rethink their existing transportation systems, assess their job access barriers, and increase transportation equity for low-income and working-class people. If policy makers and program implementers enact sensible, sustainable changes that increase low-income workers’ mobility in the short term, they then can turn their attention to a larger, greater goal in the long term: to effect smarter growth and development patterns in metropolitan areas that bring people and jobs closer together.

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