

**EXPANDING THE CONVERSATION**  
**Race, Income, Ethnicity, Transportation**

**GENESEE TRANSPORTATION COUNCIL**

March 2011  
Revised January 2012

The Genesee Transportation Council (GTC) recognizes that those with the least political power, ability, and knowledge, may be impacted negatively by transportation decisions.

A priority of GTC is to broaden the conversation on transportation within the region to encompass diverse voices.

To this end, the Genesee Transportation Council adopted an *Environmental Justice, Title VI, and Americans with Disabilities Act Involvement Plan* in December 2010. This was followed by four detailed analyses of the transportation concerns of specific communities, including this study.

The present study looks at the region's low-income and minority populations. The goal is to identify the specific issues we face as a region in relation to populations traditionally not well-represented in the transportation planning process and the questions we should consider as our conversation on transportation expands.

## An Automobile Dependent Region

The personal motor vehicle determines who is mobile and who is less-mobile in our region. Still, there are important differences in how people move around according to race, ethnicity, and income.

For the region as a whole, about 91 percent of whites, 85 percent of Latinos, and 81 percent of African-Americans depend on a car to get to work, either driving alone or carpooling. That leaves over 37,000 people who take a bus, bike, or walk to work each day. Another 19,000 work at home.

Most of the people who take a bus to work are in Monroe County, and almost half of those (49 percent) are African-American. In the outlying counties, fewer than 1,000 people ride the bus to work each day, 84 percent of whom are white.

Interestingly, more people walk to work than take the bus in every single county in the region. In the outer counties, this is true regardless of race or ethnicity. In Monroe County, more than twice as many whites walk to work as take the bus, and slightly more whites ride a bike to work than commute by bus. African-Americans, on the other hand, are nearly three times more likely to take a bus to work than walk, and six times more likely to bus than bike. Latinos in Monroe County walk and bike to work in only slightly fewer numbers than take the bus. Whites throughout the region work at home in greater numbers than African-Americans and Latinos.

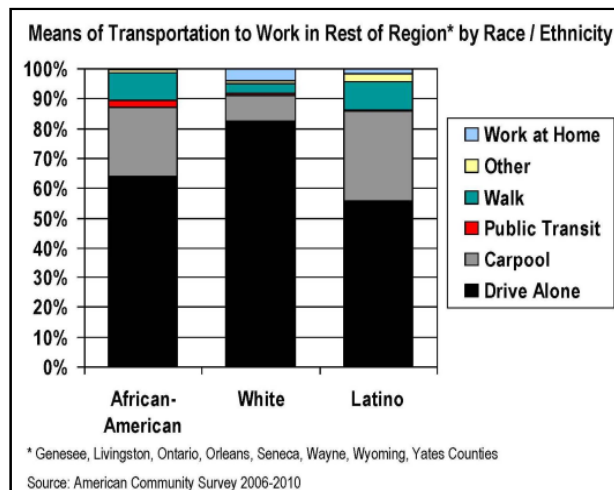
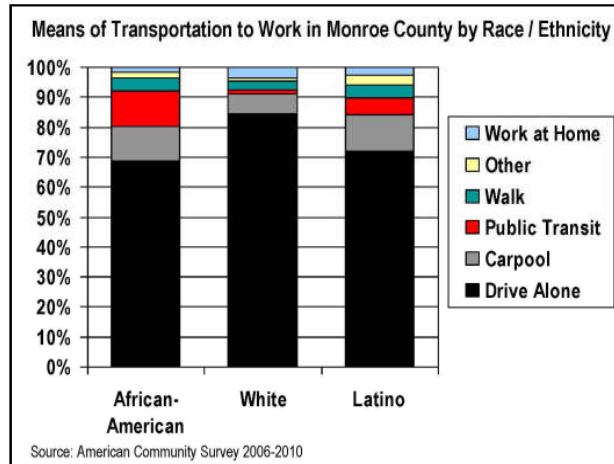
### How We Get to Work (%)

#### Monroe County

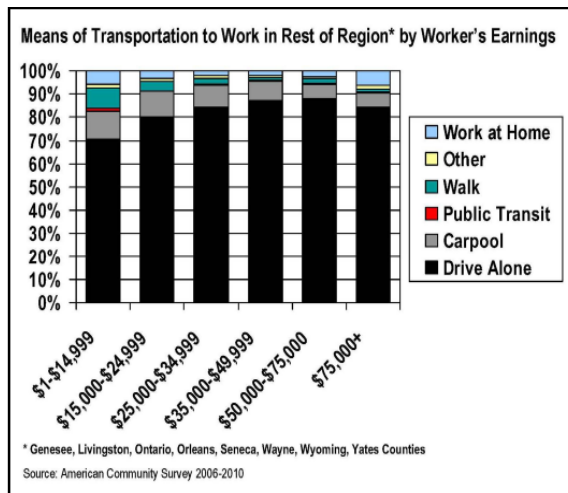
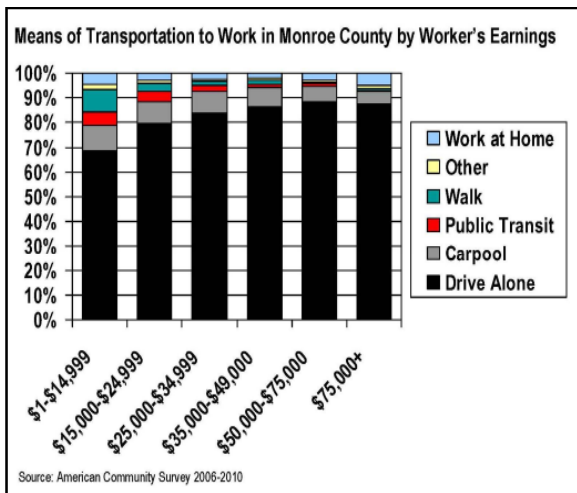
	African-American	White	Latino
Drive Alone	68.7	84.4	71.9
Carpool	11.5	6.8	12.2
Bus	12.0	1.1	5.7
Walk	4.2	3.0	4.4
Other	1.8	1.2	3.2
Work at Home	1.8	3.5	2.6

#### Other Counties

	African-American	White	Latino
Drive Alone	64.0	82.4	55.9
Carpool	23.2	8.8	29.8
Bus	2.3	0.4	0.6
Walk	9.3	3.6	9.5
Other	0.8	1.0	2.6
Work at Home	0.4	3.8	1.6



Not surprisingly, the number of people who drive to work each day — especially those who drive alone — rises with income. At almost all income levels, in all counties, as many or more people walk to work than use public transit. This may indicate that even bus fare is too expensive for many individuals, or bus waits/routes are inconvenient, or that there is a stigma attached to bus ridership. More people tend to work at home at the lowest and highest income levels. The Census does not ask if people work at home by choice or necessity.



Nationally, transportation expenses, as a percentage of household income, are fairly consistent and high across all income levels. Transportation is the second largest household expense, after housing.

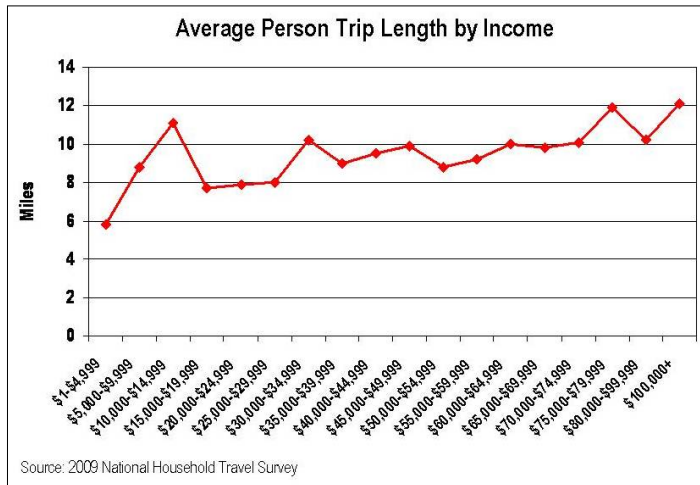
For lower-income families, transportation expenses are an even greater burden. They can impact a family's long-term financial prospects, eroding wealth and imposing significant opportunity costs. A car loses 90 percent of its value over ten years, by most estimates. Home ownership, on the other hand, can preserve or build equity and bring access to high-performing public schools and job opportunities. A car loan, however, can make it difficult to get a home mortgage.

Household Income	Percent of Income Spent on Housing	Percent of Income Spent on Transportation	Average Number of Vehicles in Household
Less than \$5000	41.6	12.2	0.9
\$5,000 - \$9,999	41.7	12.6	0.8
\$10,000 - \$14,999	41.9	13.1	1.0
\$15,000 - \$19,999	40.3	15.3	1.2
\$20,000 - \$29,999	37.9	16.7	1.5
\$30,000 - \$39,999	36.0	17.5	1.7
\$40,000 - \$49,999	35.3	17.5	1.9
\$50,000 - \$69,999	34.9	16.2	2.2
\$70,000 +	32.2	15.7	2.7
Regional Average	34.4	16.0	2.1

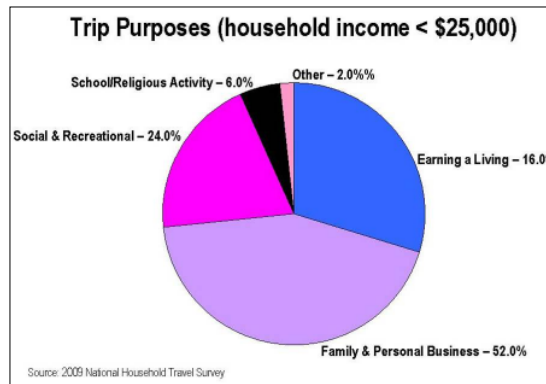
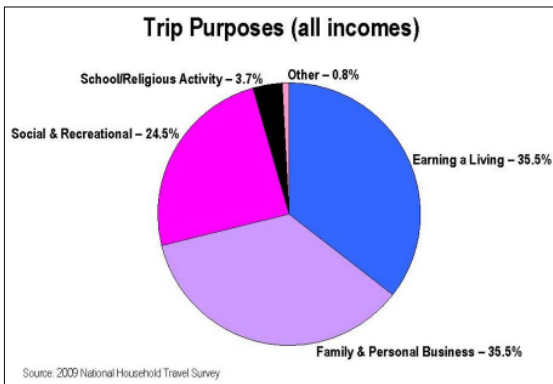
Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Expenditure Survey 2010

Primarily because of high transportation costs, lower-income households have less access to household vehicles than higher-income households.

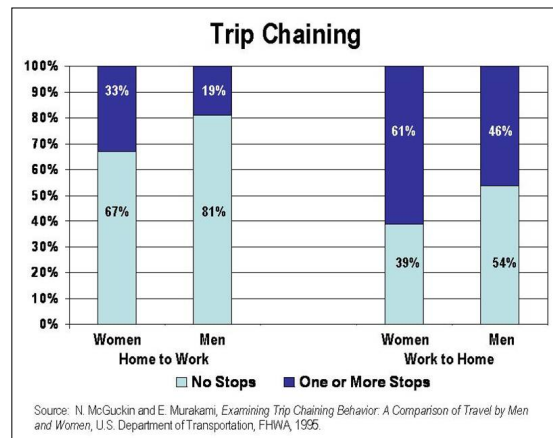
Regardless of income, people must make trips to work, school, church, shop, and visit family and the doctor. Trip distances, therefore, do not vary much by income.



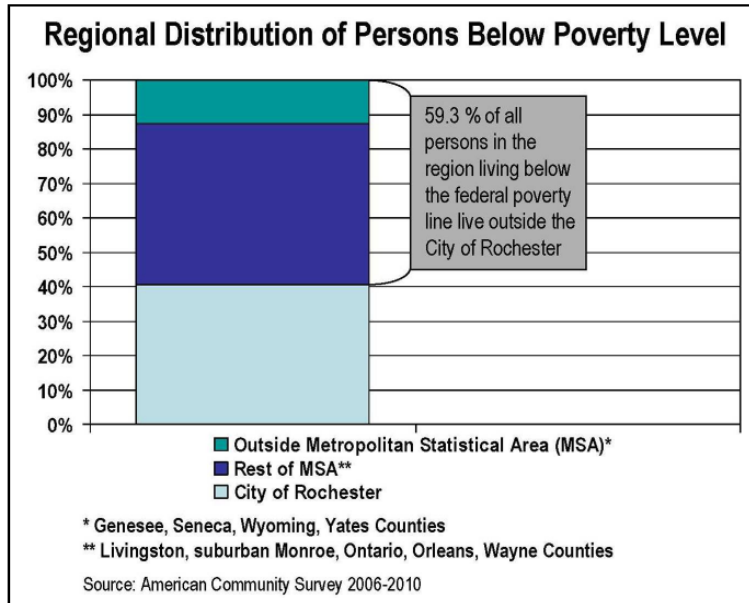
However, individuals in households with incomes less than \$25,000 — those least likely to own a private vehicle — make fewer trips to and from work, the times of day when bus service is most frequent, but stores, medical offices, and other services are often closed. To meet their transportation needs, low-income individuals must often take the bus during nonpeak hours, adding greatly to trip times, or arrange car rides with others.



The necessity of juggling trips falls mainly to women. Women are far more likely than men to make multiple stops — called trip chaining — on their way to or from home. This is significant because we have been witnessing a “feminization of poverty” in America over the past two decades, as more elderly women and single women with children of all races and ethnicities fall into poverty.



The number of individuals in poverty is increasing in the suburbs faster than in the City of Rochester. Most of the region's poor live outside of Rochester. Over 89,000 people in Genesee, Livingston, suburban Monroe, Ontario, Orleans, Seneca, Wayne, Wyoming, and Yates counties live below the federal poverty level. The personal mobility of this population may be more vulnerable to gasoline price hikes since they have fewer transportation alternatives to the car for all but the shortest distances.



## A Multi-Pronged Approach

A multi-pronged approach — based on increasing automobile access and improving other modes of transportation — appears necessary to meet the needs of the region's low-income and minority populations.

### Automobile Access

Because of low population and employment densities in most of the region, lack of traffic congestion, and abundant and low-priced parking, all modes of transportation except the private motor vehicle are generally inferior in the sense that they limit opportunities for work, health care, shopping, etc. In the short term, access to a car is perhaps the surest way of ensuring that low-income and minority individuals can travel where they need to go in a reasonable amount of time.

Automobile access does not have to mean ownership. The *Long Range Transportation Plan*

#### Benefits of Cars in Our Region

- Geographic access to opportunity (jobs, schools, housing choice).
- Ability to make multiple trips (save time).
- Convenience (leave when you want; carry packages; travel with children; protected from weather).

#### Disadvantages of Cars

- Reduce air quality.
- Expensive for households.
- Increase dependence on foreign oil.
- Require public subsidies of roads.
- Encourage sprawl.

for the *Genesee-Finger Lakes Region*, which is intended to guide transportation planning and investment until 2035, recommends new car-sharing programs. Most car-sharing services allow members to rent a vehicle (often a small, energy-efficient vehicle) on an as-needed basis, and charge by hour or mile, or a fixed annual fee.

### Public Transportation

Because of our land use patterns and limited public resources, public transportation service in the region is essentially a kind of commuting-to-work system, which most users utilize twice daily, concentrated in a few hours, and which is therefore difficult to make feasible for most commuters.

Both the Genesee Transportation Council and the Rochester Genesee Regional Transportation Authority (RGRTA) are engaged in long-term efforts to make public transportation a system that works for more people for more hours by connecting working and living activities.

The Genesee Transportation Council, as a planning organization, encourages municipalities to consider how transportation can link people to jobs, schools, and services. GTC provides incentives and guidance for communities to link transportation planning with land use planning. (See, for example, [www.gtcmpo.org/LinkingTransportation.htm](http://www.gtcmpo.org/LinkingTransportation.htm).)

GTC also supports studies to coordinate the services of public, not-for-profit, and private transportation providers to better serve residents of all incomes and all ages throughout the region, including a forthcoming *Regional Mobility Management Business Plan*.

RGRTA is moving ahead with plans to construct urban transit centers, as well as create guidelines to help communities and developers accommodate public transportation in the design of their projects.

These and other initiatives may permit an increase in the frequency of bus service over the mid- and long-term.

The region may also want to consider lobbying the state for a change in state law to remove the barriers that effectively prevent private jitney service. Jitneys are more flexible than traditional fixed-route bus service and have proven effective as alternatives to the car in such states as New Jersey and Florida.

### Pedestrian/Bicycle Improvements

Few regional transportation organizations in the United States emphasize the need for bicycle and pedestrian facilities more than GTC. Per capita spending on safe, efficient, non-motorized transportation modes is greater in our region than perhaps anywhere else in the country. Moreover, 80 percent of the transportation expenditures in our region are dedicated to maintenance and safety, such as ensuring that sidewalks, crossings, and curb ramps exist where they need to be and are in good shape.

GTC has also funded major pedestrian, bicycle, and traffic circulation plans for several municipalities, and is helping advance a regional bike-sharing program.

Bike-sharing is an example of the complexities involved in providing personal mobility for people of all ages, incomes, and backgrounds.

Data in this report show that few African-Americans of any income in the City of Rochester ride a bicycle to work, compared to those who rely on other modes of transportation and compared to whites and Latinos who bike.

The data suggest that perhaps a bicycle, though far cheaper than a car, still represents a significant cost for low-income individuals. Or perhaps a bicycle is a symbol of poverty to many African-Americans that is to be avoided, while a car is a symbol of prosperity, and being able to ride a bus symbolizes hard-won civil rights gains. Or maybe there are neighborhood and traffic safety concerns to bike ownership.

This issue and the others identified in this report will continue to receive GTC's attention, in partnership with other public and community organizations.

### **About GTC**

The Genesee Transportation Council (GTC) guides transportation planning in the Genesee-Finger Lakes region, which includes Genesee, Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Orleans, Seneca, Wayne, Wyoming, and Yates Counties.

By federal law, every urbanized area of the country with over 50,000 people must have a formal planning organization for transportation. The Genesee Transportation Council fills that role in our region. GTC is authorized to conduct transportation planning and oversee transportation investment.

The Genesee Transportation Council assures that no person shall, on the grounds of race, color, national origin, disability, age, gender, or income status, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program or activity. GTC further assures every effort will be made to ensure nondiscrimination in all of its programs activities, whether those programs and activities are federally funded or not.

### **Contact GTC**

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