DEMOGRAPHIA

**TRANSIT IS ABOUT DOWNTOWN:**
**THE ILLUSION OF TRANSPORTATION CHOICE: CHICAGO**

**Transit to Downtown: Automobile Competitive Service:** Transit is successful where it is automobile competitive, even where automobile ownership is high. For example, 75 percent of commuters to Manhattan's central business district used transit in 1990,[1] compared to only 15 percent who use cars. More than one-half of commuters to the Chicago "Loop" central business district used transit. The median transit work trip market share to the nation's largest downtown areas was 16.6 percent[2] --- more than three times transit's overall work trip market share.[3]

Among transit work trips, approximately 2.5 million of the 6.1 million daily work trips were to 25 central business districts that occupy less than 50 square miles of land --- barely twice the area of the island of Manhattan and less than 0.1 percent of the nation's urbanized land area.[4] This produces more than 50,000 daily transit work trips per square mile, and there is no doubt that without transit traffic congestion to these areas would be greater. At the same time, however, there is no guarantee that new rail services to downtown areas would reduce traffic congestion further, since downtowns already have by far the strongest transit market shares.

Central business districts are losing market share. Less than two percent of new employment from 1960 to 1990 was in central business districts.[5] Losses have continued even as downtown areas have become better served by major transit improvements. From 1994 to 1999, downtown Los Angeles lost employment, while metropolitan employment gained. In Dallas-Fort Worth, downtown employment expansion represented less than one percent of job growth. In Minneapolis-St. Paul, where the "Northstar" commuter rail line is planned, downtown employment growth was less than one percent of the metropolitan total.[6] Generally, metropolitan planning organizations project that job growth will continue to be focused outside downtown areas.

Downtown's dominance of metropolitan skylines can lead to an impression that most employment is downtown. But, on average, downtowns represent less than 10 percent of metropolitan employment.[7] Even the New York central business district, the world's second largest, represents less than 20 percent of employment in the New York area.

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[1] Latest data available. New data will is expected to be available from the 2000 U.S. Census during 2003.
[2] www.publicpurpose.com/ut-25cbd$.htm.
[3] Transit's work trip market share was 5.1 percent in 1990. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, transit's work trip market share was 4.6 percent.
[4] 1990 data. 2000 data not yet available.
[5] Calculated from Kenworthy & Laube (data available for Boston, Chicago, Denver,Houston, Los Angeles, Phoenix, Portland, San Diego, San Francisco and Washington) and US Census Bureau and Regional Plan Association of New York (New York data calculated using 1955 Regional Plan Association estimate, scaled to 1960 and 1990 US Census Bureau data).
[6] Calculated from U.S. Census Bureau *County Business Patterns* data.
[7] Calculated from U.S. Census Transportation Planning Package, 1990.

Finally, there is little potential for transit expansion in areas that do not already have commuter rail. No urban area without commuter rail has central business district employment levels equaling that of Los Angeles, which has the smallest central business district among the six areas with regional commuter rail systems.

**Transit Outside Downtown: Little Automobile Competitive Service:** Transit is used far less to the non-downtown locations that represent more than 90 percent of employment. In 1990, the median transit work trip market share among metropolitan areas with the largest downtowns was 3.4 percent. By comparison, a larger percentage of households --- 11.5 percent --- did not have access to an automobile in 1990.

The much smaller transit shares outside downtown stem from the fact that there is little or no automobile competitive service. As a result, people who have access to cars cannot be attracted to transit. It is not surprising, therefore, that commuters who use transit to non-downtown work locations have incomes 41 percent below average. [8] By contrast, transit commuters to downtown had incomes eight percent below average. The lower incomes of non-downtown transit commuters would seem to indicate a lower rate of automobile availability.

In 1990, transit provided 3.6 million daily transit work trips to the 80,000 square miles of urbanized area outside downtowns --- a trip density 1/1000$^{th}$ that of the large downtowns. At less than 50 commuters per square mile, transit has virtually no impact on traffic congestion for trips to the more than 99.9 percent of urban territory outside downtown.

For example, in the Chicago area, a survey of suburb to suburb commuting indicated an average one-way transit travel time of 2 hours and 39 minutes --- a two way daily travel time of more than five hours.[9] This is more than three times the average transit work trip travel time of 49.7 minutes in the Chicago area. It is also more than five times the average work trip length for non-transit trips (mostly automobile) in the Chicago area (29 minutes).[10] The shortest transit suburb-to-suburb work trip was 43 minutes, while the longest was 3 hours and 56 minutes.[11] In Chicago and elsewhere, the automobile simply has no competition for the overwhelming majority of commutes, which are to outside downtown locations, and as noted below, there are no factors on the horizon that would change this.

[8] Calculated from U.S. Census Transportation Planning Package, 1990.
[9] Not including walking to and from transit stops.
[10] 2000 Census data.
[11] This analysis used the Regional Transportation Authority (http://tripsweb.rtachicago.com/) trip planner for work trips from the suburban Orland Mall area to approximately 60 suburban locations built into the trip planner.