



TRANSPORTATION ACCESS HELPS LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

Overview of *Driving to Opportunity*:

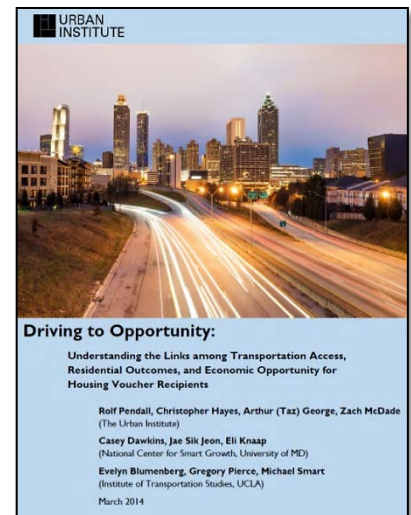
Understanding the Links among Transportation Access, Residential Outcomes, and Economic Opportunity for Housing Voucher Recipients

Growing research suggests that transportation is important to the outcomes for low-income people to succeed in housing programs that relocate them to lower-poverty neighborhoods. Households that receive housing vouchers choose a wider range of neighborhoods than public housing residents and unassisted renters.

The Urban Institute's *Driving to Opportunity: Understanding the Links among Transportation Access, Residential Outcomes, and Economic Opportunity for Housing Voucher Recipients* (March 2014) describes the barriers voucher users face when they try to obtain housing in high-opportunity neighborhoods.

Research was conducted on two U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) voucher programs (Moving to Opportunity-MTO and Welfare to Work-WTW) in order to determine whether low-income families benefitted from living in lower-poverty neighborhoods. The research focused on these specific questions:

- How do housing choice voucher recipients sort into different neighborhoods?
- What role does transportation play in voucher users' residential choices?
- How do transportation access and residential location choice influence economic opportunity?



To measure and classify neighborhood sustainability, six major dimensions were identified, as shown in Table 1. These were determined by examining neighborhood opportunity, livability and sustainability indicators, grouping them into sets of needs.

Table I. Dimensions and Subdimensions of Neighborhood Sustainability

Dimension	Subdimension
Natural environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• urbanization• highway proximity• health outcomes• environmental hazards
Functional environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• housing market strength• housing diversity• transit access
Social environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• level of household distress• socioeconomic status of residents
Economic vitality	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• level of household distress• housing market strength• presence of neighborhood work opportunities• density of income
Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• incidence of violent and property crime• public perceptions of safety
Access to opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• access to high-quality elementary schools• job access

Driving to Opportunity points out that access to automobiles as well as high-quality, effective public transportation, are important in determining the residential location choices and economic outcomes for low-income households. Better neighborhoods (less poverty, proximity to better access for potential employment, services and other opportunities) enhance the likelihood of success for residents. Key findings were in three research areas.

Neighborhood Sorting

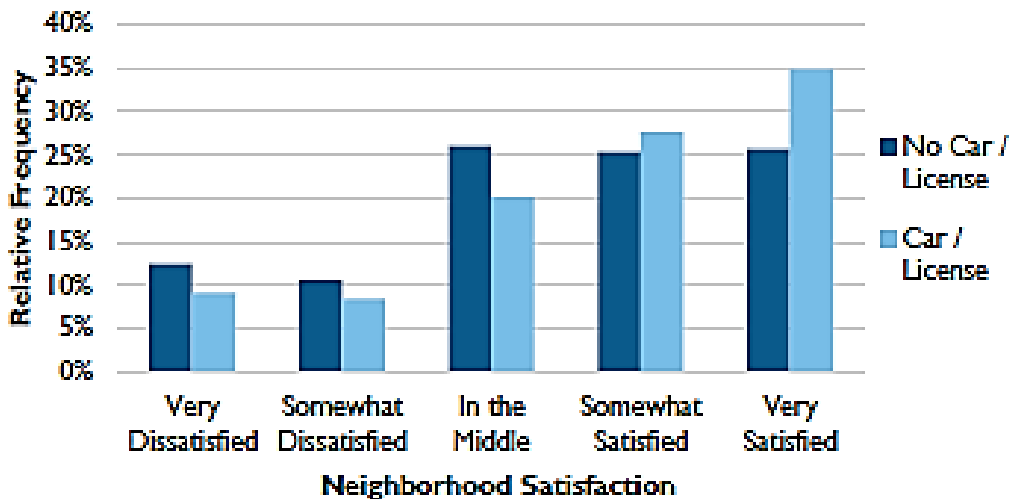
- Families with access to cars more often obtained housing in neighborhoods where environmental and social quality exceeded that of neighborhoods without cars. Families with cars also felt safer in their neighborhoods.
- There were trade-offs for low-income households for neighborhood conditions. MTO voucher households with cars lived in more spread out neighborhoods, lower density, less diverse housing stock, and worse school performance.
- Very few with housing prices affordable to most families had more advantages and fewer disadvantages.
- A relatively small number of census tracts have exceedingly high crime rates, failing schools, high levels of environmental deterioration and deep poverty, although these census tracts are often in convenient locations.
- The MTO voucher cities (Boston, Baltimore, Chicago, New York, Los Angeles) have many transit choices, while the WTW cities (Atlanta, Houston, Spokane, Fresno) have less developed transit systems.

Transportation and Residential Location Choice

- Households with automobiles often experience less exposure to poverty and are less likely to move back to high-poverty neighborhoods than those without access to vehicles.
- When relocating from their baseline neighborhoods, voucher participants with vehicles moved to areas with lower concentrated poverty, lower unemployment, higher median rents, more owner-occupied housing, lower vacancy rates, more open space and lower levels of cancer risk.
- Voucher program participants with vehicles tend to move to areas with higher levels of school performance.
- Access to vehicles increases neighborhood satisfaction, especially where public transportation is limited.
- Voucher program participants with vehicles live in areas with less public transportation and in areas less conducive to walking.

Chart 1 shows the neighborhood satisfaction for housing voucher participants with and without access to vehicle license. Those with access to a car/license were more likely to report being somewhat or very satisfied with their neighborhoods.

Chart 1: Neighborhood Satisfaction by Car or License Access



Effect of Transportation Access and Residential Location Choices on Economic Opportunity

- In areas where voucher participants without cars live, there may be a larger number of available jobs than where voucher participants with vehicles live. There is a compensating effect in that those with cars live in neighborhoods where fewer low-income people compete for available jobs.

- Keeping or acquiring a vehicle is positively related to the likelihood of employment.
- Better access to public transportation is positively associated with maintaining employment but not related to obtaining employment.
- Both cars and enhanced public transportation access have a positive effect, although vehicle ownership has far more positive effect.

Conclusions suggest that there be better coordination between transportation and housing services. In noting that vehicle ownership promotes access to better neighborhoods, as well as a way for residents to get to work and better schools. It noted that if HUD knew which program participants had access to vehicles, programs could be developed that would promote economic self-sufficiency.

Driving to Opportunity also suggests policies that would enhance “access to opportunity” for low-income households. For example, households without vehicle access could search for housing in areas with better public transportation access. It indicates that there are few federal programs to help low-income families gain access to automobiles and that requirements of some programs may create a barrier to transportation access.

<http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/413078-Driving-to-Opportunity.pdf>

“As new transportation legislation is being debated, and social equity concerns are playing a more prominent role in the design of federal transportation policy, perhaps it is time to better coordinate federal housing and transportation programs in ways that enhance the upward mobility of low-income households.” (Driving to Opportunity)

The map at right shows the percentage of Davidson County households that did not have access to a vehicle by Census Tract, according to the 2009-2013 American Community Survey by the U.S. Census Bureau.

