



Invest in Transit Services for Opportunity, Freedom, & Racial Justice

Tennessee



**National Campaign for Transit Justice
& Just Strategy**

Summer 2021



Introduction

Buses and trains mean mobility, opportunity, and freedom. For this reason, public transit historically has been at the center of civil rights efforts. One example is the Civil Rights Movement's victory over formal segregation of buses and trains. Yet the work of building equitable public transit is far from over, as evidenced by the persistent neglect of bus systems around the country.¹

For more than forty years, federal transportation funding has been out of balance, with only a small share going to public transit. This disinvestment has deprived Black Tennesseans of the frequent, reliable, and accessible bus and train service they need to get to work and take care of other day-to-day needs. The result is lost job opportunities, setting back racial equity, depressing economic activity, and hurting the state as a whole.

Congress now has an opportunity to make a historic investment in public transit, including funding to put more buses on the road and more trains on track. With \$20 billion in annual transit services funding, Congress can help reduce wait times, increase bus and train frequency, expand service, promote racial justice, and tackle climate change.

The data in this report shows how this funding will boost transit service in four metropolitan regions in Tennessee. As examples, it then shows the number of jobs increased service will put within reach of residents of the Hickory Hill section of Memphis, where 74 percent of residents identify as Black and 24 percent as Latinx,² and within reach of the residents of Memphis's Castalia Heights neighborhood, where 98 percent of residents identify as Black.³

1. Inclusive Transit: Advancing Equity Through Improved Access & Opportunity, TransitCenter, July 17, 2018, <https://transitcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Inclusive-1-1.pdf>

2. American Community Survey Demographic and Housing Estimates Table, DP05, 2019: Five-Year Estimate for Shelby County Census Tract 217.31. Figure is rounded and includes people who identify as Black alone or in combination with one or more other races.

3. American Community Survey Demographic and Housing Estimates Table, DP05, 2019: Five-Year Estimate for Shelby County Census Tract 65. Figure is rounded and includes people who identify as Black alone or in combination with one or more other races.



More transit service is a vehicle for racial equity

No matter where a person lives, or how much money they have, they should be able to count on safe, reliable, and accessible transit. Yet fewer than 10 percent of people in the U.S. now live within walking distance of transit that comes every 15 minutes or less.⁴

The disinvestment in frequent, reliable transit blocks economic opportunity for Black Tennesseans. Nationally, 60 percent of all public transit riders are people of color, and one quarter are Black.⁵ Black people across the country are more likely than whites to count on buses, trains, and other forms of public transit as their primary transportation option,⁶ and are more likely to use public transportation to get to work.⁷ People of color who take public transit to work are more likely than their white counterparts to have commutes that take 60 minutes or longer, one-way.⁸

When bus and subway service is unreliable or infrequent — or when service is cut — Black people bear the brunt and lose economic opportunity. Furthermore, recent shifts in residency patterns have put jobs further out of geographic reach for residents of many neighborhoods where people of color are a majority of residents. This makes frequent, reliable transit service all the more important.

Conversely, investments in public transit contribute to Black and brown working people gaining an economic foothold.⁹ And, through this transit ridership, Black Americans make a crucial contribution to cooling the planet. Policymakers can do their part by investing in making public transit reliable, frequent, safe, and accessible.

4. To Tackle the Climate Crisis and Racial Inequity, We Need to Run a Lot More Transit Service, TransitCenter, January 25, 2021, <https://transitcenter.org/we-need-federal-to-tackle-the-climate-crisis-we-need-support-for-transit-operations/>

5. Who Rides Public Transportation, American Public Transportation Association, January 2017, <https://www.apta.com/research-technical-resources/research-reports/who-rides-public-transportation/>

6. National Equity Atlas: Car Access, https://nationalequityatlas.org/indicators/Car_access.

7. Monica Anderson, Who Relies on Public Transit in the U.S., Pew Research Center, April 7, 2016, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/04/07/who-relies-on-public-transit-in-the-u-s/>

8. Algernon Austin, To Move Is to Thrive, Demos, 2017, <https://www.demos.org/research/move-thrive-public-transit-and-economic-opportunity-people-color>

9. Ibid.



A historic opportunity to invest in equitable transit services

Congress is now discussing proposals to fund a national recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Transit is essential to this effort. Yet, for decades federal funding of transportation has been out of balance, with 80 percent of transportation funding going to highways and only 20 percent to public transit in cities, towns, and rural areas. Moreover, traditionally the federal government has funded capital projects – such as new subway or light rail systems – without providing the funding that keeps buses and subways running.

The federal government now has the opportunity to invest not only in building new projects but also in the transit services that get people where they need to go. An annual investment of \$20 billion for operations could translate into large improvements in service -- more frequent bus and train service, lower wait times, and more reliability.

This federal investment would spur service increases ranging from 52 to 94 percent across Tennessee's major metropolitan regions, depending on the formula for distribution. As described in the methodological note, TransitCenter researchers modeled three different potential formulas for distributing the investment among urban regions. The table below shows the minimum and maximum amount each urban region would receive.



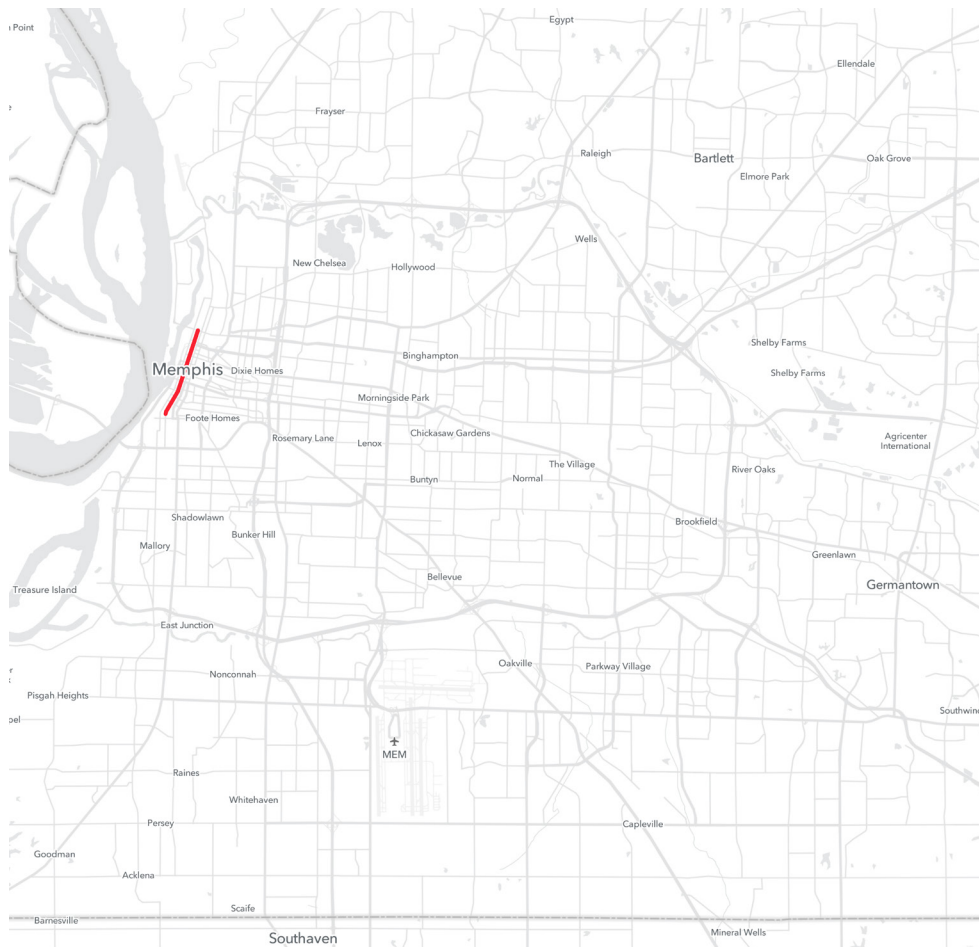
For example, depending on the formula, Chattanooga could see a minimum 52 percent increase or a maximum 74 percent increase. The modeled funding formula that delivers the maximum investment to Knoxville would mean a 90 percent increase in service. Notably, under any of these approaches to distribution, the \$20 billion investment would support significant increases in service across urban regions in Tennessee.

Region	Operating Funds from New Program (Min)	Operating Funds from New Program (Max)	% Increase in Service Hours (Min)	% Increase in Service Hours (Max)
Memphis, TN-MS-AR	\$ 29,733,437	\$ 37,859,007	53%	67%
Chattanooga, TN-GA	\$ 10,475,513	\$ 14,702,117	52%	74%
Knoxville, TN	\$ 15,840,634	\$ 23,813,767	60%	90%
Nashville-Davidson, TN	\$ 57,680,940	\$ 87,910,780	62%	94%

These before and after maps illustrate what a 67 percent increase in service could look like in Memphis (focusing on routes with all-day frequent service, as frequent service is the most important driver of increased access to opportunity):

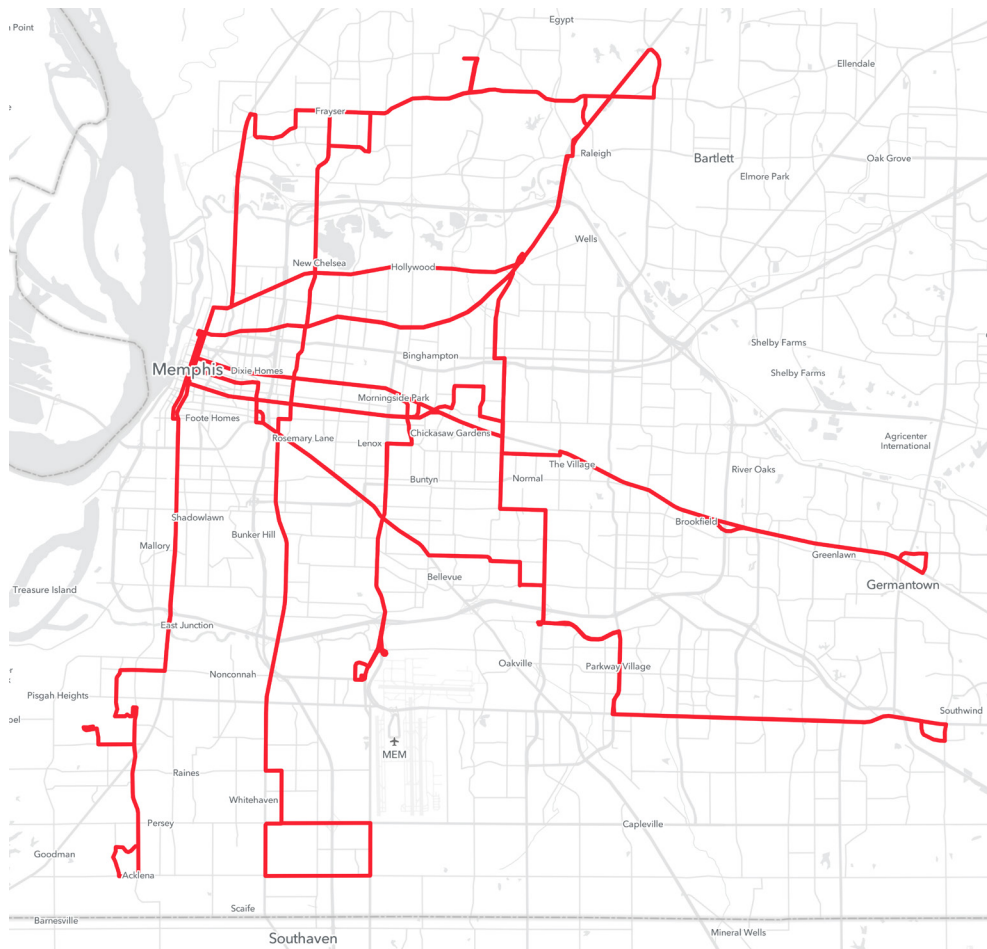
Before

This map shows the routes in Memphis that arrive every 15 minutes or less throughout the day.



After

If service is increased, frequent routes will have broader reach over the city.





Investing in bus and train service will mean more jobs and opportunity for Black Tennesseans

This increase in transit service would mean an increase in the number of jobs available to Black Tennesseans. The following maps illustrate the impact from the perspective of a resident of Hickory Hill section of Memphis, where 74 percent of residents identify as Black and 24 percent as Latinx,¹⁰ and a resident of Memphis's Castalia Heights neighborhood, where 98 percent of residents identify as Black.¹¹

For Hickory Hill, the first map shows that, today, the average resident can reach approximately 9,817 jobs within 30 minutes on public transit. The second map shows the difference that a 67 percent increase in transit service would make. With that service increase, the average resident of this area of Memphis could reach approximately 18,471 jobs within 30 minutes on transit.

For Castalia Heights, the first map shows that, today, the average resident can reach approximately 2,631 jobs within 30 minutes of leaving their home and using public transit. The second map shows the difference that a 67 percent increase in transit service would make. With that service increase, the average resident could reach approximately 19,551 jobs within 30 minutes on transit.

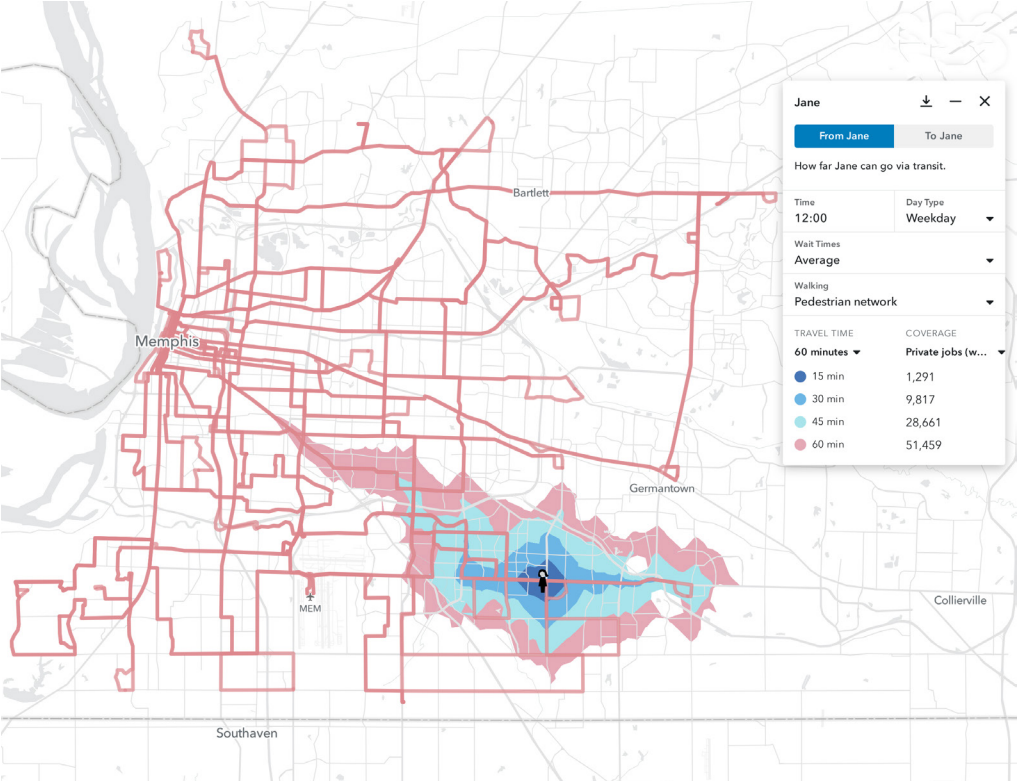
Access to jobs is an important metric because it represents not only access to employment, but also access to centers of activity, which generally house jobs. For example, educational institutions, grocery stores, and medical centers are all job centers, and therefore, an increase in access to jobs as shown in this example represents a growth in overall access to community services and private businesses.

10. American Community Survey Demographic and Housing Estimates Table, DP05, 2019: Five-Year Estimate for Shelby County Census Tract 217.31. Figure is rounded and includes people who identify as Black alone or in combination with one or more other races.

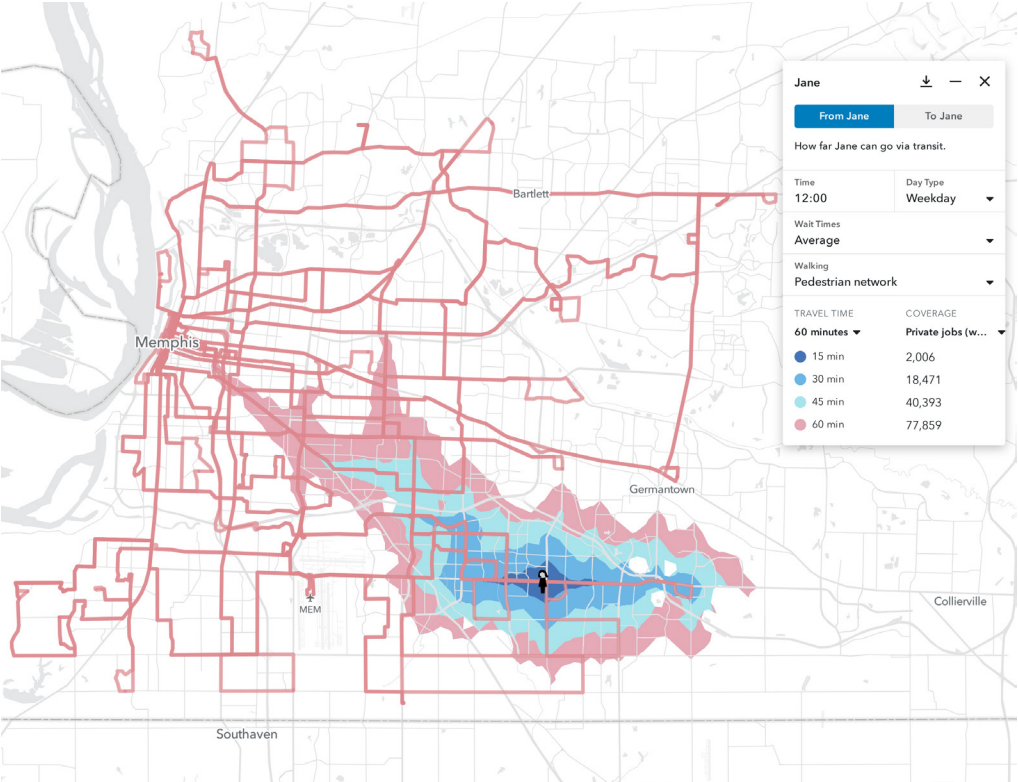
11. American Community Survey Demographic and Housing Estimates Table, DP05, 2019: Five-Year Estimate for Shelby County Census Tract 65. Figure is rounded and includes people who identify as Black alone or in combination with one or more other races.

12. <https://humantransit.org/2021/03/basics-access-or-the-wall-around-your-life.html>

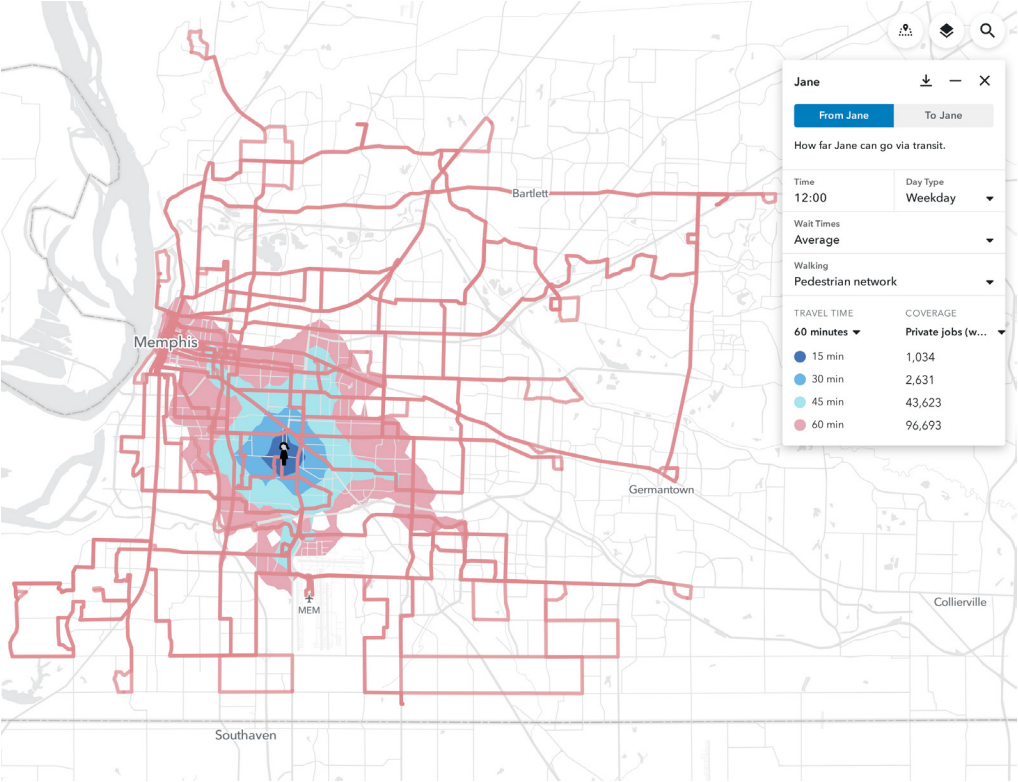
Hickory Hill: Current



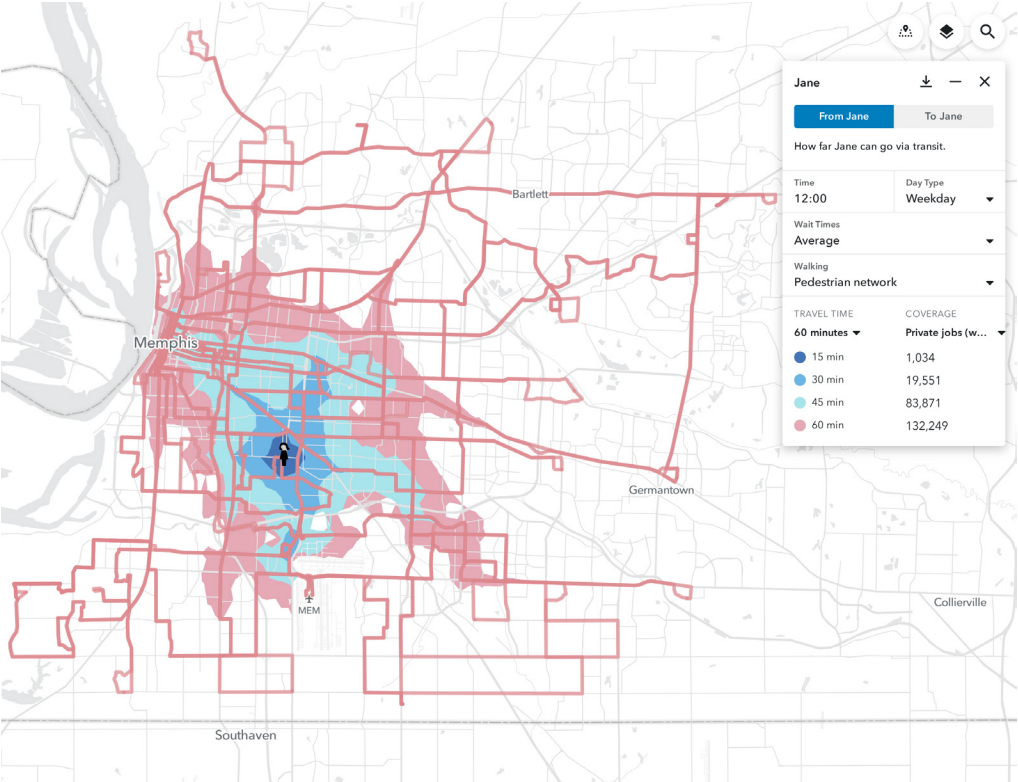
Hickory Hill: With 67 Percent Increase in Service



Castalia Heights: Current



Castalia Heights: With 67 Percent Increase in Service





Conclusion

Access to frequent, safe, reliable, and accessible public transit is a matter of civil rights and equity.

This year, Congress has the opportunity to make public transit work better for all Tennesseans, particularly Black Tennesseans, and nationwide by investing in more frequent transit service and reduced wait times. This investment will be an investment in economic opportunity, racial equity, and a cooler climate.

Methodology

The service increase data was produced by the TransitCenter modeling three scenarios for distributing \$17.8 billion in operating support to urban areas. The first scales up Urbanized Area Formula Funding Section (Section 5307) as it was distributed in regular FY20 appropriations. A second formula is based 50 percent on the 5307 program and 50 percent on the cost of operating transit in 2018. A third formula scales up the section 5307 program but reapportions it so that 65 percent of the funding goes to urban areas with populations of 1 million or more, 21 percent goes to urban areas with populations between 200,000 and 1 million, and 14 percent goes to urban areas with populations between 50,000 and 200,000 people. The remaining \$2.2 billion is assumed to be dedicated to transit in rural areas.

The jobs reach data was produced by the TransitCenter and Remix. An explanation of the methodology is available at the link in this footnote.¹³

13. https://transitcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Transit_Center_Methodology-.pdf