

Op-Ed: Improving Transit Equity as a Pandemic Recovery Strategy

NAT BOTTIGHEIMER, BRANDON MCKOY | MAY 27, 2020 | **OPINION, CORONAVIRUS IN NJ**

Current crisis provides an opportunity to rethink how we fund mass transit and to make it more responsive and resilient



Sign up for NJ Spotlight's daily newsletter, including evening "Tonight's Spotlight" with daily update on the coronavirus in NJ.

Stay informed

Your Email

SUBSCRIBE

[I'm already a subscriber](#)

[I'm not interested](#)

For example, 40% of households in Newark either do not have a car or have a household budget that is stressed by car ownership, compared to 6% for New Jersey as a whole. These families are left to rely on an underfunded and unreliable public transit system. Add to this longer commute times for multiple jobs, and it's clear that these New Jerseyans face barriers that their suburban, car-driving counterparts do not.

Pre-pandemic, bus riders in Newark already had their trips delayed by cars exiting major highways onto city streets, forcing city residents to wait as suburban travelers jumped the queue. Data from New Jersey Transit shows that cars jumping the queue could make buses up to 40% slower. This dynamic is likely only to get worse as we start to recover from COVID-19 and more people prioritize travel by car over public transportation, at least temporarily.

Rethinking mass-transit funding

Creating a transit system, and economy, that addresses the needs of communities hit hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic also means implementing an equitable tax code so that the state can raise enough revenue to support such critical actions. Right now, that means an increase in federal support for NJ Transit's operating budget, which has been decimated by declining ridership revenue. As the economy reopens over the next year, transit service

✕

Sign up for NJ Spotlight's daily newsletter, including evening "Tonight's Spotlight" with daily update on the coronavirus in NJ.

Stay informed

[I'm already a subscriber](#) [I'm not interested](#)

fleets in New Jersey sets an example for how to do this, prioritizing transportation investment in economically vulnerable communities that are disproportionately exposed to air pollution and that experience high asthma rates. But as we recover, much more will need to be done.

New Jersey's economy can be rebuilt in a way that supports more equity, a healthier environment, and greater resilience to both future pandemics and climate change. Public transportation must be a vital part of that recovery.

Nat Bottigheimer

Nat Bottigheimer is the New Jersey director at the Regional Plan Association.

Brandon McKoy

Brandon McKoy is president of New Jersey Policy Perspective.



Sign up for NJ
Spotlight's daily
newsletter,
including evening
"Tonight's
Spotlight" with
daily update on the
coronavirus in NJ.

Stay informed

[I'm already a subscriber](#)

[I'm not interested](#)