

# Philadelphia



# From West Philly to the Northeast to Germantown, all Philadelphians deserve affordable, reliable access to the places they need to go.

Public transit has the potential to provide this access. SEPTA and other agencies serve the Philadelphia urban area via an expansive network of subway, local bus, trolley, and regional rail.

Today, most Philadelphians can ride public transit to reach hundreds of thousands of destinations.



20

minute trip from the supermarket

40

minute trip home

35

minute commute

# In the City of Philadelphia, people who ride public transit most often also have the best access to opportunities by public transit.

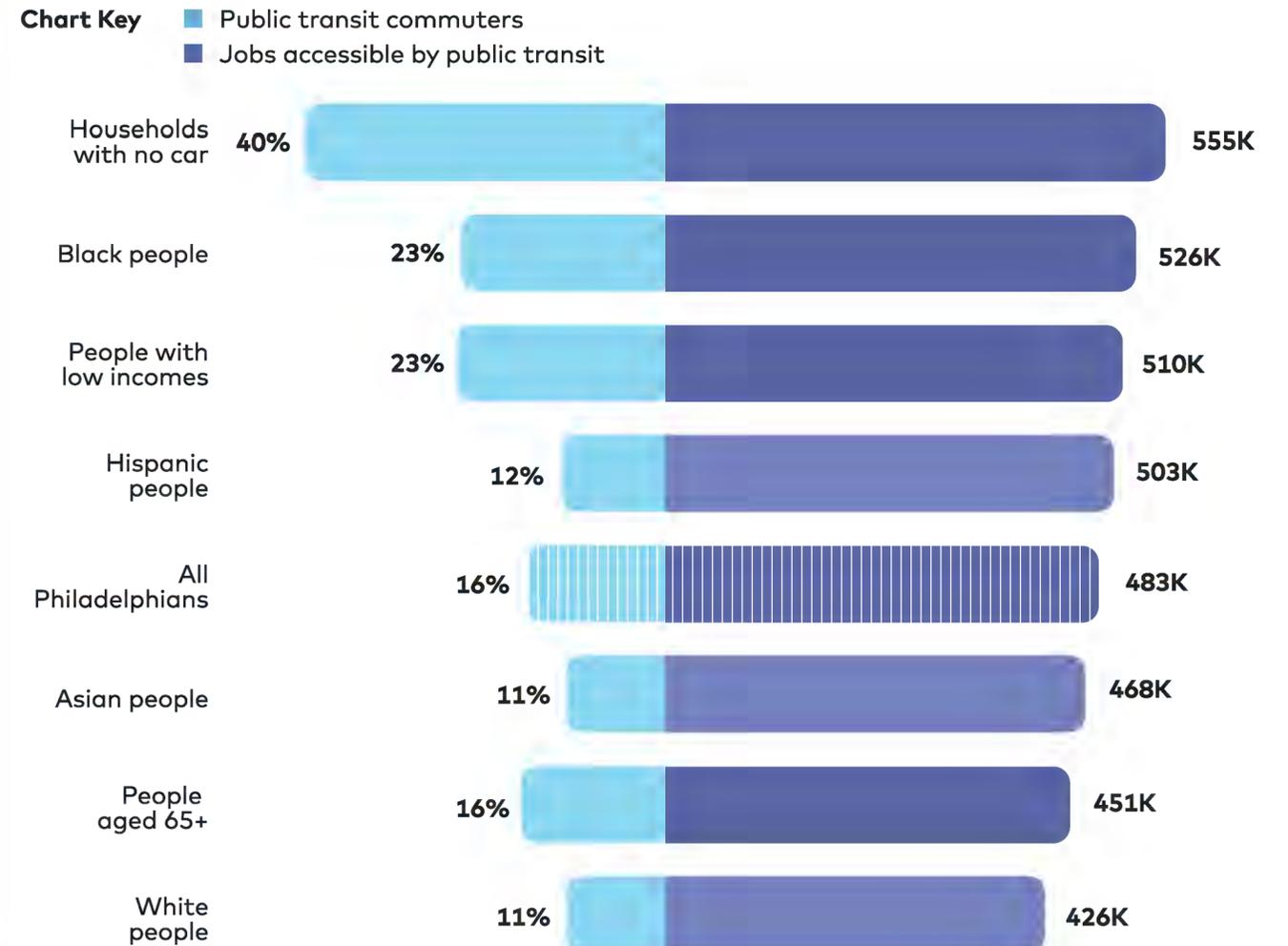
For example, 23% of Black Philadelphians commute by public transit, and they can reach 525,000 potential jobs on transit within an hour. By comparison, 16% of workers citywide commute by public transit, and they can reach about 480,000 jobs by public transit.



## Commuting and jobs accessible in 60 minutes by public transit, Philadelphia residents

### ★ Chart Insight

In Philadelphia, Black people, people with low incomes, and people without cars are most likely to commute by public transit. Their level of access by public transit is substantially higher than the average Philadelphian.



Access data from TransitCenter based on transit schedules for weekday mornings, March 2024; Transit commuter data from 2022 American Community Survey

# However, Philadelphia's transportation system grants better access to people with greater economic means and more flexibility for travel.

Workers with 9-5 jobs have better transit job access, even though they are less likely to commute to in-person work than a third-shift worker.

Someone who can only spend a few dollars on fares is priced out of Regional Rail trips to the suburbs and interagency transfers. They have less access by transit than others, and they likely cannot afford to drive or call an Uber either.

Owning a car is five times more expensive per month than unlimited rides on SEPTA's regional network. Yet Philadelphians who drive have dramatically higher access to jobs and other opportunities, making car ownership necessary for many, even if it's also a financial hardship.



## Jobs accessible in 60 minutes for Philadelphia residents

### ★ Chart Insight

In Philadelphia, a public transit rider can reach 20% more potential jobs on weekday mornings than on weekday evenings, and 10% more paying any fare than if they spent less than \$4 per trip. Drivers can access five times more jobs in 60 minutes than transit riders.

Chart Key

- Driving, weekday AM
- Transit, weekday AM

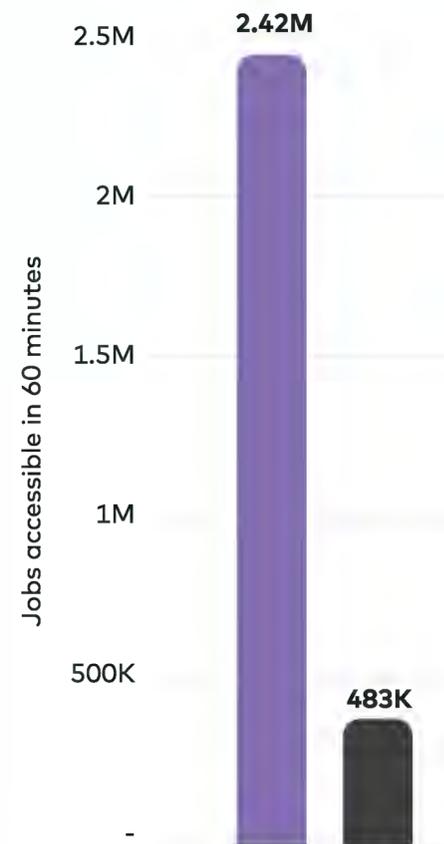
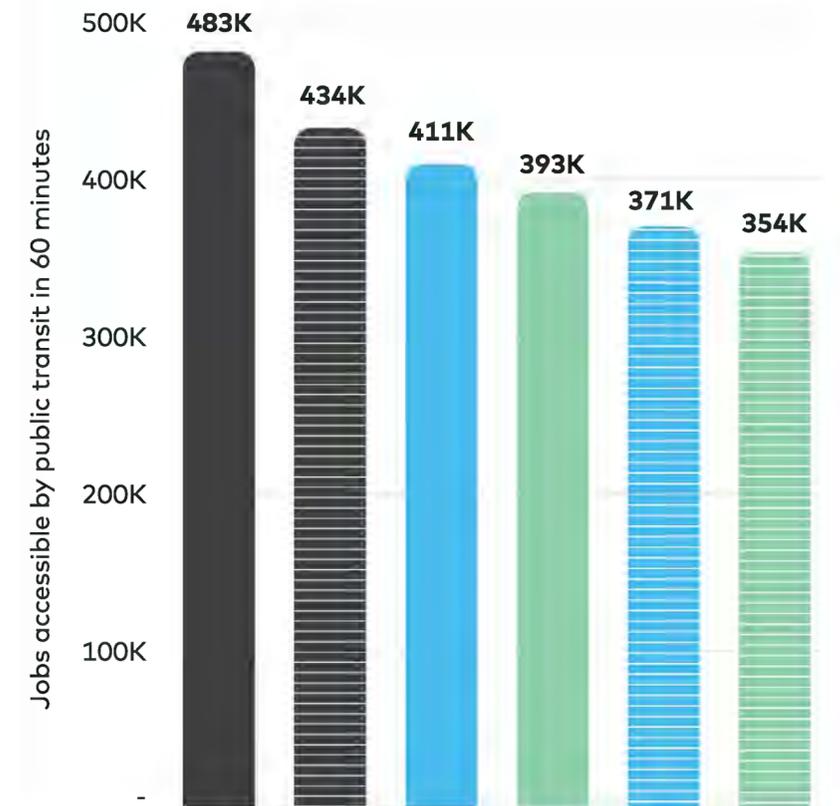


Chart Key

- Weekday AM, all trips
- Weekday AM, trips <\$4
- Saturday AM, all trips
- Weekday evening, all trips
- Saturday AM, trips <\$4
- Weekday evening, trips <\$4



Buses do not have priority on city streets, causing bus riders to get stuck in traffic behind solo drivers in cars.

Philadelphia officials control what is built on city streets and sidewalks. They proposed building dedicated bus lanes, boarding islands, and bus shelters as part of its long-term planning process.

If built, these bus priority projects would enable SEPTA to schedule faster, more frequent buses across the city — and make riding the bus easier and more reliable.

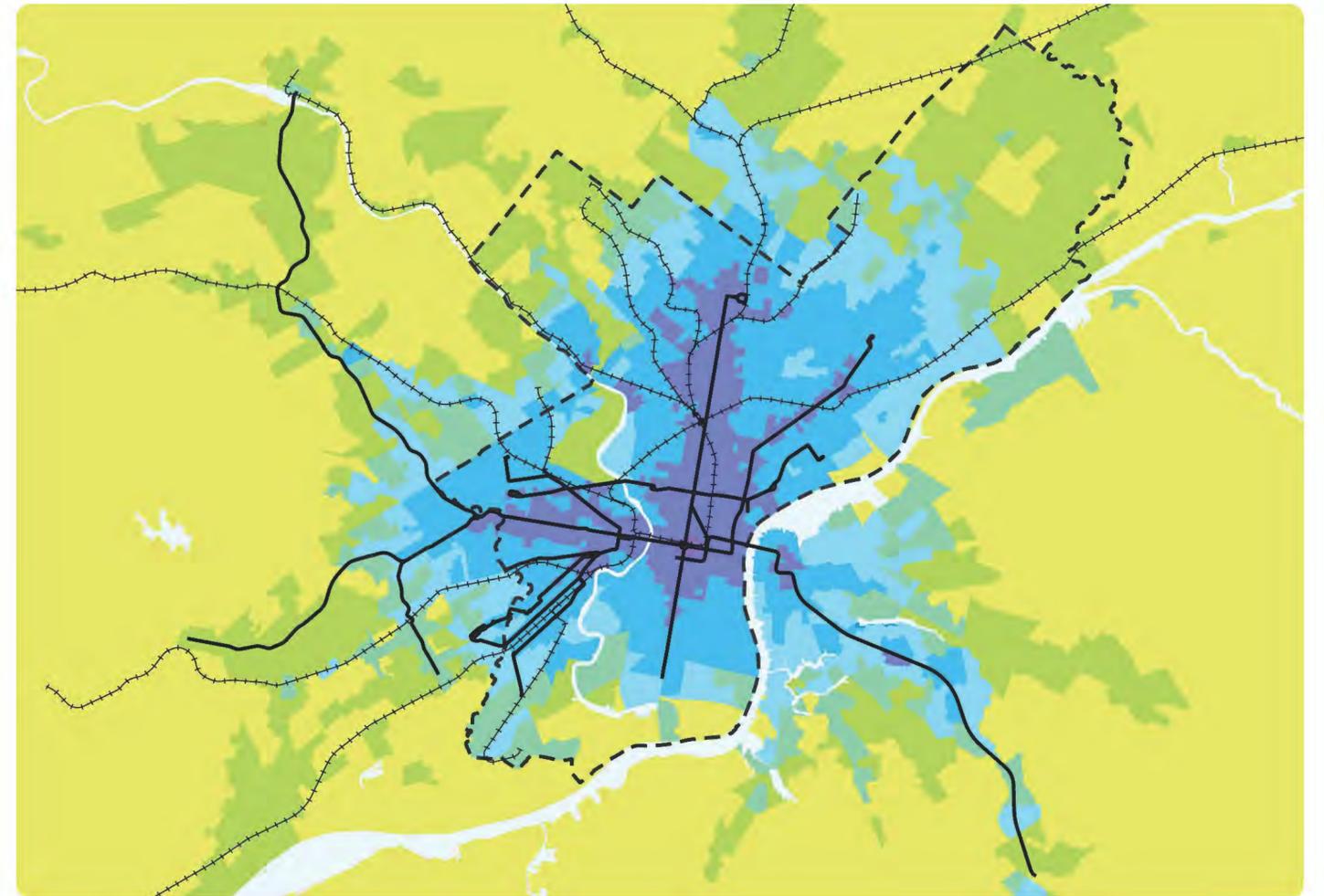
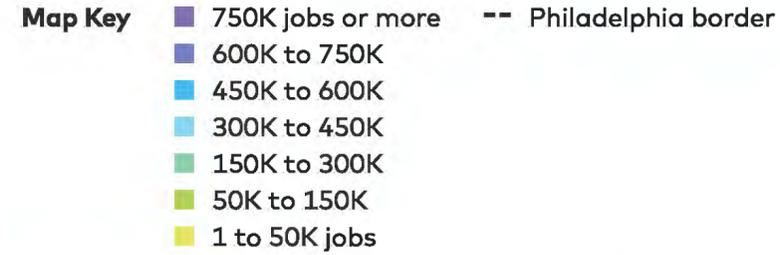
**The City should enact bus priority plans sooner rather than later to swiftly improve accessibility for Philadelphia’s hundreds of thousands of daily bus riders.**



## Jobs accessible in 60 minutes by public transit for Philadelphia region residents

### ★ Map Insight

Access by public transit is substantially higher in neighborhoods near train routes than in neighborhoods that are only served by the bus.



**"My morning commute starts 30 minutes early because SEPTA is unreliable. The variance is huge and worsening with staff shortages. I recently waited an hour and was late to work."**

**Alex**  
Philadelphia bus rider



**"I'm impacted by the lack of bus drivers and detours from the regular route which both delay the bus, to the point of other buses becoming overcrowded."**

**Jerrett**  
Philadelphia bus rider



Travel times to essential places in the Philadelphia region have been stable since the summer of 2020, indicating that SEPTA only made small schedule adjustments.

But SEPTA has increasingly struggled to deliver scheduled service. By making transit operator roles more challenging and operator wages less competitive, COVID-19 instigated an operator shortfall at the agency.

SEPTA hasn't pared down its schedules to reflect its smaller workforce, forcing trip cancellations when no operators are available to run the trip.

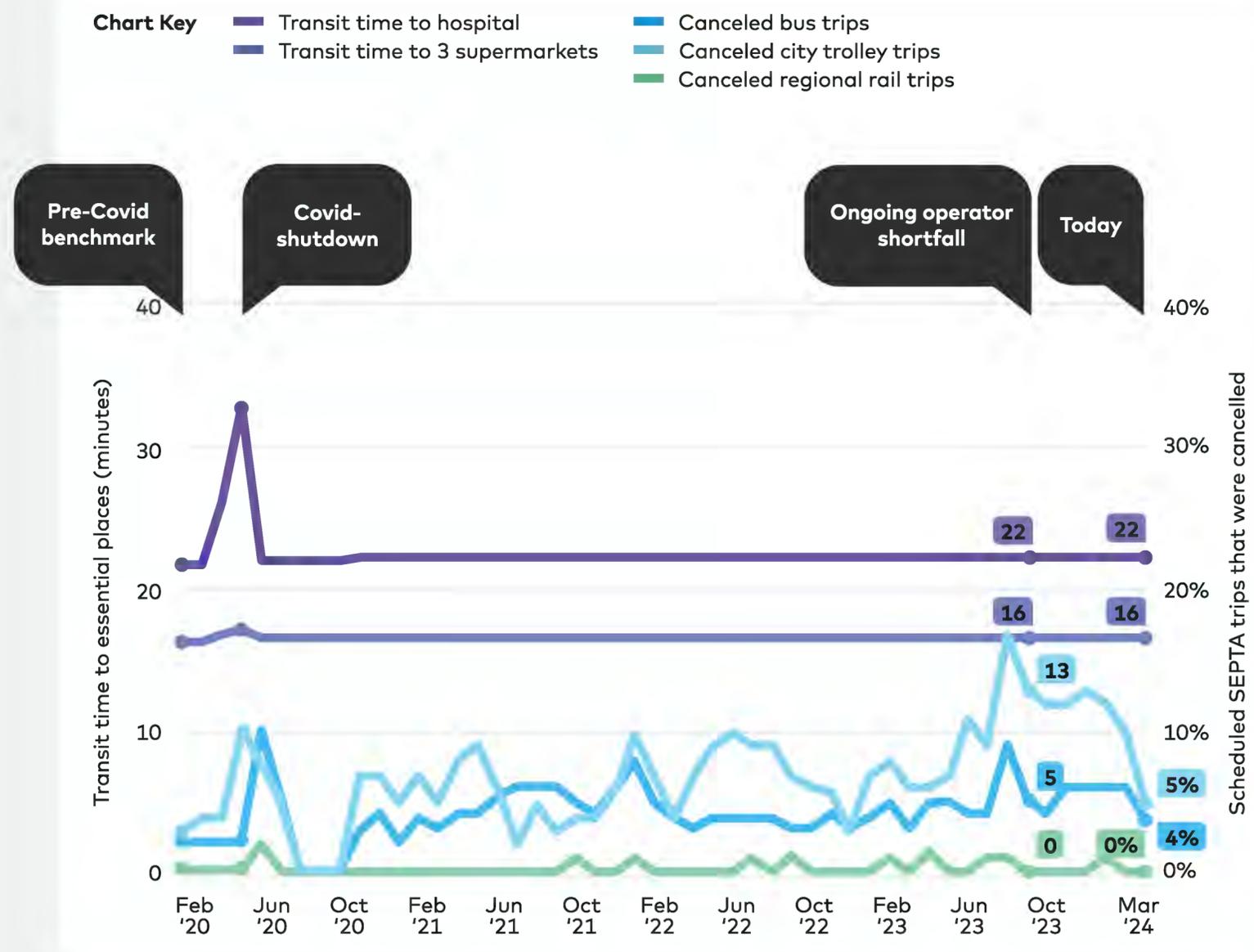
**Trip cancellations mean Philadelphia transit riders can access fewer places, less reliably than what schedules suggest.**



# Transit time to essential places for Philadelphia residents vs. SEPTA trip cancellations

### ★ Chart Insight

Over the past year, SEPTA canceled 5-15% of its city trolley service and 5-10% of its bus service. Cancellations occur more often than before COVID-19 or on Regional Rail.



Access data from TransitCenter based on transit schedules for weekday mornings and evenings. Trip cancellation data from SEPTA. Due to missing dates, cancellation data not included for subway or high-speed rail.

**Over the past two years, Philadelphia transit riders have experienced little change in what they can access by public transit while reliability has worsened.**



Local and state governments don't contribute enough money to transit operations, depriving SEPTA of a cushion for disaster or room to expand.

Over the past two years, Philadelphia transit riders have experienced little change in what they can access while reliability has worsened. (Bright spots include a new rail station in Delaware County and new fare programs).

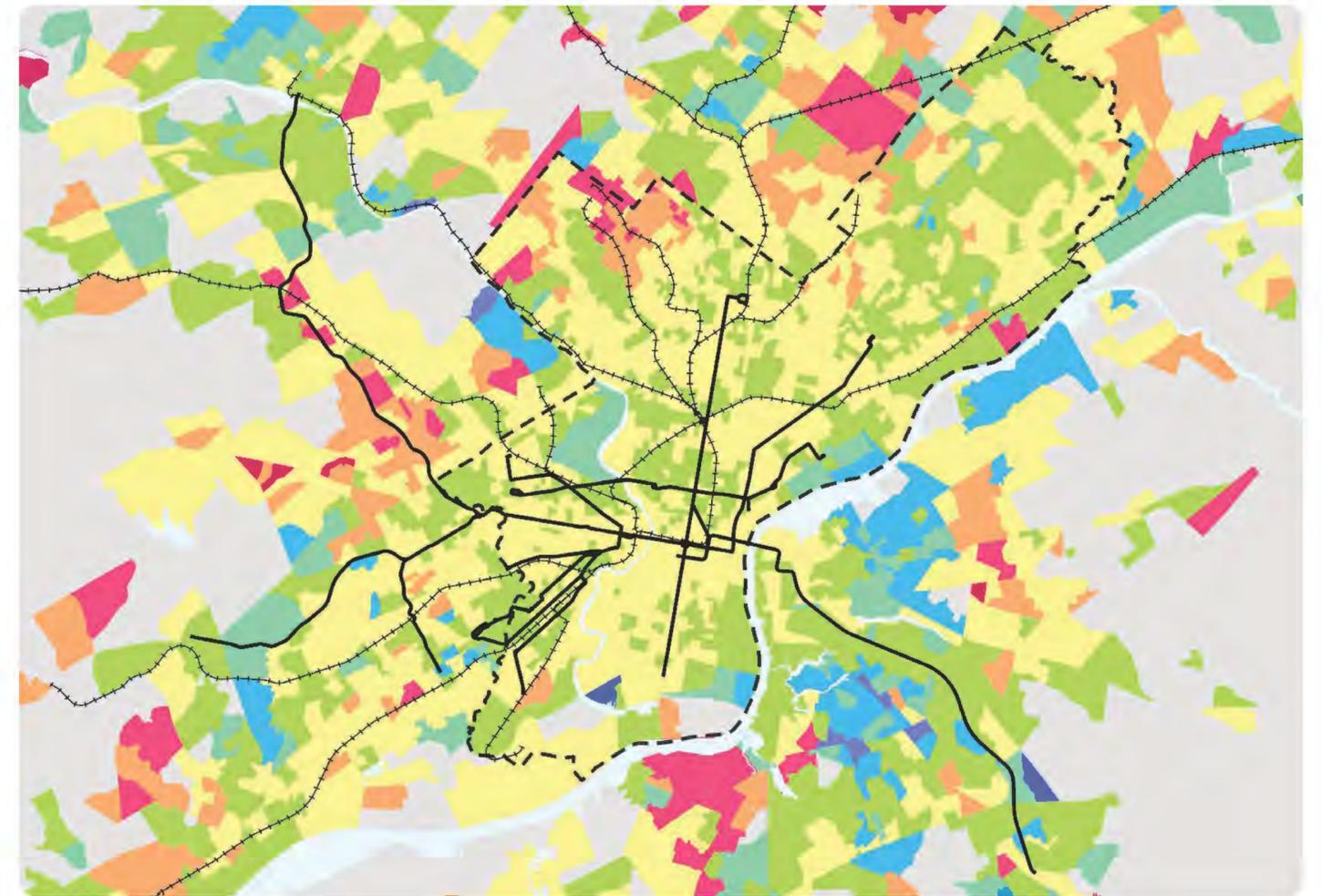
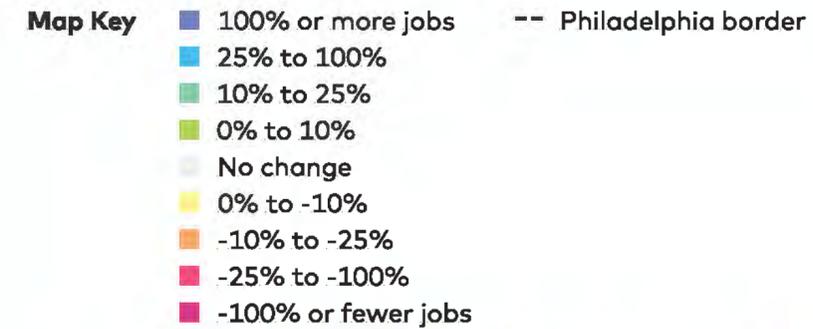
## “Little change” to a transportation system that offers magnitudes greater access to drivers than transit riders fails Philadelphians...

...because driving is more expensive, dangerous, and polluting.

To provide a much-needed transportation revolution for Philadelphians, SEPTA needs to first regrow its workforce so that it can deliver service reliably. Then, it needs to substantially expand its transit operations. These actions require street space and government funding. State, suburban, and city governments must expand and sustain their support for SEPTA.



## Change in jobs accessible in 60 minutes by public transit for Philadelphia region residents, March 2022-24



## About this analysis

The access to opportunity data used in this analysis comes from TransitCenter's Transportation Equity Dashboard (TED). Data are based on changes to transit agency schedules and fare policy, where people live (data from 2017-2021 American Community Survey), where jobs are (data from 2021 LEHD), and where other essential places are (based on open-source geospatial data).

Because the TED access to opportunity data is based on transit schedules, it does not factor in reliability issues or on-time performance. Time periods are: weekday mornings from 7-9am; weekday evenings from 9-11pm; and Saturday mornings from 10-12am. The "region" described in this analysis is the Census-defined urbanized area.

## Visit

To explore more access to opportunity data, visit the Transportation Equity Dashboard at [www.dashboard.transitcenter.org](http://www.dashboard.transitcenter.org). For more information on the methods used to generate the access to opportunity data, visit the TED About page.

## TransitCenter

1 Whitehall Street, 17th Floor  
New York, NY 10004

🌐 [www.TransitCenter.org](http://www.TransitCenter.org)

✖ @transitcenter

📘 Facebook.com/transitctr

## TransitCenter

TransitCenter is a foundation that works to secure a more just and sustainable future with abundant public transportation options. We recognize that our current transportation system is contributing to climate change, that transit systems poorly serve many of their riders, and that access to opportunity in the U.S. is deeply inequitable because of unjust, historical barriers based on race, gender, culture, and identity.

We believe that targeted research and effective grassroots advocacy can persuade leaders to make better choices that center both climate and justice outcomes in transportation. We make grants, conduct research, and coordinate a national network of local advocates to build a successful movement pushing for bold shifts in transportation funding and strategy.

For more information, please visit [www.TransitCenter.org](http://www.TransitCenter.org).

## Acknowledgments

This report was written by Mary Buchanan with contributions from Hayley Richardson, Chris Van Eyken, Kapish Singla, and Eric Lundy. The author wishes to thank Transit Forward Philadelphia for their report storyboarding and review, riders who shared their transit stories, and Klumpentown Consulting, which built TransitCenter's Transportation Equity Dashboard. Any errors are TransitCenter's alone.

Publication Date: June 2024

## Photo credits

Cover—<https://phlcouncil.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/SS019056.jpg>

Slide 1—7beachbum (Flickr user)

Slide 5—Dima Valkov; SEPTA City Transit

Slide 7—Trev Takes Photos

## Design

L&L Design (landl.us)

