

ARRIVE TOGETHER: TRANSPORTATION ACCESS AND EQUITY IN WISCONSIN

A first-of-its-kind report, "Arrive Together: Transportation Access and Equity in Wisconsin", shows how people's needs are not being met by the state's transportation system. The report examines the effectiveness of public transit access to major employers and other areas of interest. Statewide, the report's authors identify a lack of transit access to school, work, the store, doctor's office, and other needs.



These gaps in the transportation system disproportionately impact those who are unable to drive or cannot afford to drive - including seniors, people with disabilities, low- to middle-income Wisconsinites, and young people. Public transit plays a vital role in the lives of many Wisconsinites, connecting people of all ages, incomes and abilities to the places they need to and want to go. And yet, policymakers are failing to make necessary investments in this essential component of Wisconsin's transportation system. As the authors of this report conducted interviews with transit riders and planners and evaluated census, ridership and budget data, it was hard to miss a number of recurring themes across Wisconsin's transit systems, both related to transportation barriers and possible solutions.

Arrive Together was created by 1000 Friends of Wisconsin, Chippewa Valley Transit Alliance, CUSH, NAOMI, MICAH, ESTHER, Sierra Club-John Muir Chapter, SOPHIA, Wisconsin Council of the Blind and Visually Impaired, and WISDOM.

OCTOBER 2018

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TRANSIT SYSTEM PROFILES

The report examines the effectiveness and equitability of transportation in nine cities, towns and major metropolitan regions across Wisconsin. This examination is a culmination of 2010 U.S. Census data, figures provided by Wisconsin public transportation systems, the state of Wisconsin, and direct personal interviews with transit riders.



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CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Communities' transportation challenges include meeting an increasing demand for public transit due to the state's aging population; managing job growth in exurban areas that are not adequately served by transit systems; confronting historic inequities related to race and income; accounting for shifting transportation preferences among students and young adult Wisconsinites; and overcoming political barriers to increased funding and regional transportation collaboration.

Meanwhile, the solutions that would help communities address 21st-century transportation needs were similar across the board as well. Regional collaboration through RTAs, increased funding to municipalities seeking to expand transit service or make capital improvements, and creative planning to improve service to and from job hubs and throughout rural areas – including through services like shared-ride taxis or shuttles – would improve quality of life for Wisconsinites in cities, towns, and counties around the state.

Public transit plays crucial economic and societal roles in Wisconsin communities – but in order to make the most of the broad benefits of effective public transportation, federal, state and local leaders must adequately fund it. In many cases, local planning bodies have already identified solutions to improve transit systems to better serve their communities; leaders would therefore also do well to evaluate and more readily implement transit-related recommendations made by planning commissions. Transit investment is urgently needed to address economic and workforce development issues, mitigate inequities in public health outcomes, improve environmental sustainability and more, both in urban and rural areas of Wisconsin.

Regional Transportation Authorities or regional transit districts are essential to growing regional economies and addressing community needs. Other commonly identified needs for improvement include:

- Expanding the frequency of bus/public transit
- Placing bus/transit stops closer to major employment centers, hospitals, schools, and other points of interest and building bus stops so that transit stops are proximate to the entrances
- Extending the hours of operation of public transportation systems, particularly to better accommodate irregular work shifts and weekend travel needs.
- Improving connectivity between outlying areas.

“Transit is the key for work. I have my dream job now, but couldn’t get there if not for the bus.”

David, Waukesha (Story collected by SOPHIA)

