



# Fair Housing Assessment

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*Produced by the Mid-America Regional Council on behalf of the cities of Blue Springs, Independence and Kansas City, Missouri; the city of Leavenworth, Kansas; and the Unified Government of Wyandotte County/Kansas City, Kansas. This assessment is required to meet Community Development Block Grant obligations for Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing as established by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.*

# Disparities in Access to Opportunity — Transportation

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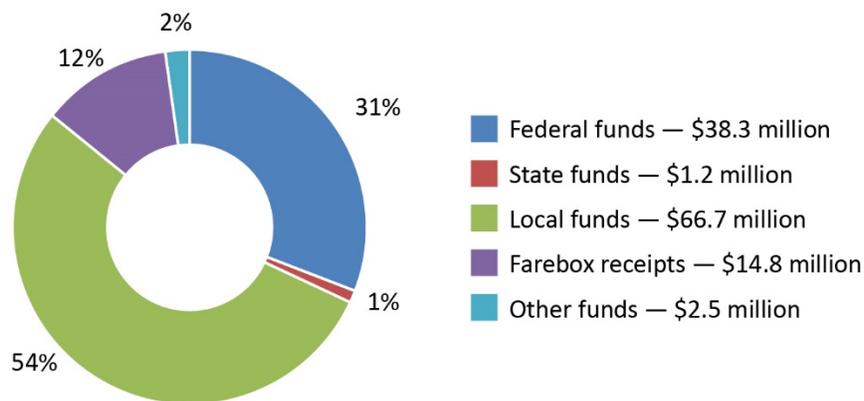
## KEY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

- People of color and low-income residents in the five cities generally have equal or better access to public transit.
- While people residing in R/ECAPs, especially in Kansas City, Missouri, have reasonably good access to public transit, transit access to suburban employment centers and areas of job growth in the metro area is limited.
- Past public policy encouraged the construction of highways, facilitating sprawl and the movement of jobs and households from the core to the metro edge. This in turn has separated those living in R/ECAPs from the job and other opportunities farther out. Because of fragmentation, the public transportation system has not been able to make strong connections between R/ECAPs and opportunity areas.
- However, the region has begun to seriously consider how it can improve its public transit system to better connect areas of concentrated poverty and people of color to opportunities.

The region’s public transportation system is a complex network of services provided by five area transit agencies — Kansas City Area Transportation Authority (KCATA), Johnson County Transit, Unified Government Transit, City of Independence Transit and the Kansas City Streetcar Authority — along with dozens of other special mobility services provided by local governments, nonprofit organizations and private firms. Funding for these services is provided through numerous sources, including federal funding through the U.S. Department of Transportation, modest amounts of state funding, dedicated local funds from the city of Kansas City, Missouri, general revenue funds subject to annual appropriation from other local governments, fares, and other sources as shown in Figure 1.

This complex system of service providers and funding sources creates challenges for transit service coordination and results in uneven levels of service and access to opportunity for riders throughout the region.

**Figure 1: Funding Sources for Public Transportation**  
Kansas City Region, 2015



Source: Federal Transit Administration. National Transit Database (NTD) Transit Agency Profiles 2015.

## Transportation Index Scores

HUD provides two indexes that help assess access to transportation infrastructure, particularly public transportation, and illustrate access varies by race and ethnicity, both for the population as a whole and for those living in poverty. The first index is the Transit Index (Table 1), which measures transit trips used by families. A higher index score indicates better access to transit. The second index is the Low Transportation Cost Index (Table 2), where a higher index score indicates a lower transportation cost for families.

**Table 1: Transit Index Scores**

	KCMO	KCK	Independence	Blue Springs	Leavenworth	KC Region
<b>Total Population</b>						
White*	42.27	33.71	35.63	31.98	39.40	34.92
Black*	47.27	41.24	37.54	32.97	40.97	43.92
Hispanic	48.09	45.74	37.68	32.16	40.98	43.31
Asian or Pacific Islander*	46.13	43.09	35.82	32.62	40.26	42.47
Native American*	45.30	38.98	36.88	33.19	39.98	36.09
<b>Population below Federal Poverty Line</b>						
White*	47.01	38.47	39.34	33.95	40.50	37.34
Black*	49.04	46.56	38.47	35.90	41.93	46.83
Hispanic	49.88	47.92	40.56	38.42	43.19	46.91
Asian or Pacific Islander*	52.86	48.76	35.70	37.28	33.96	46.79
Native American*	46.09	39.26	32.71	33.00	42.98	37.67

\* Non-Hispanic

**Table 1: Low Transportation Cost Index Scores**

	KCMO	KCK	Independence	Blue Springs	Leavenworth	KC Region
<b>Total Population</b>						
White*	59.79	53.13	55.73	48.98	51.63	50.55
Black*	63.67	56.70	58.84	50.87	54.20	60.30
Hispanic	65.06	61.02	57.45	49.3	52.57	60.11
Asian or Pacific Islander*	64.77	58.92	56.15	49.55	51.71	58.30
Native American*	62.55	55.68	56.13	50.32	51.07	52.11
<b>Population below Federal Poverty Line</b>						
White*	65.66	59.24	59.40	51.29	55.30	54.29
Black*	66.04	61.39	58.59	57.28	60.87	63.97
Hispanic	66.85	62.66	60.10	55.88	53.78	64.17
Asian or Pacific Islander*	72.00	64.27	49.14	60.02	54.89	65.30
Native American*	65.41	59.51	49.73	48.00	58.76	55.95

\* Non-Hispanic

For the total population in the region, whites have less access to transit (transit index = 34.92) than do blacks (43.92), Hispanics (43.31), Asian/Pacific Islanders (42.47) or Native Americans (36.09). This difference is also reflected in the Low Transportation Cost Index with whites in the total population experiencing higher transportation costs (Low Transportation Costs Index = 50.55) as compared with blacks (60.30), Hispanics (60.11), Asian/Pacific Islanders (58.30) or Native Americans (52.11).

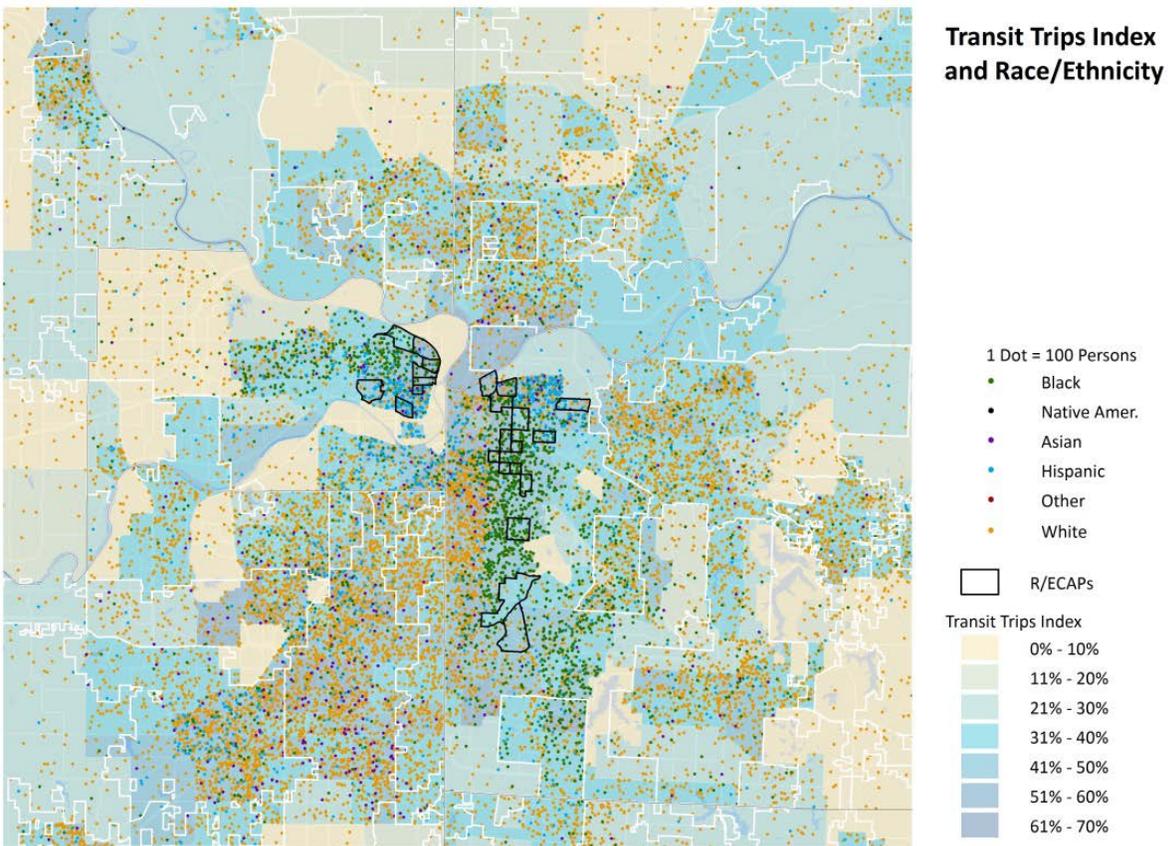
This same pattern holds for those below the federal poverty line. For both indexes, the scores for those below the federal poverty line are approximately four to five points higher than the scores for the general public. Low-income residents have slightly better access to transit and their

transportation costs are slightly lower. The pattern for low-income persons among racial and ethnic groups is similar to that for these groups in the total population.

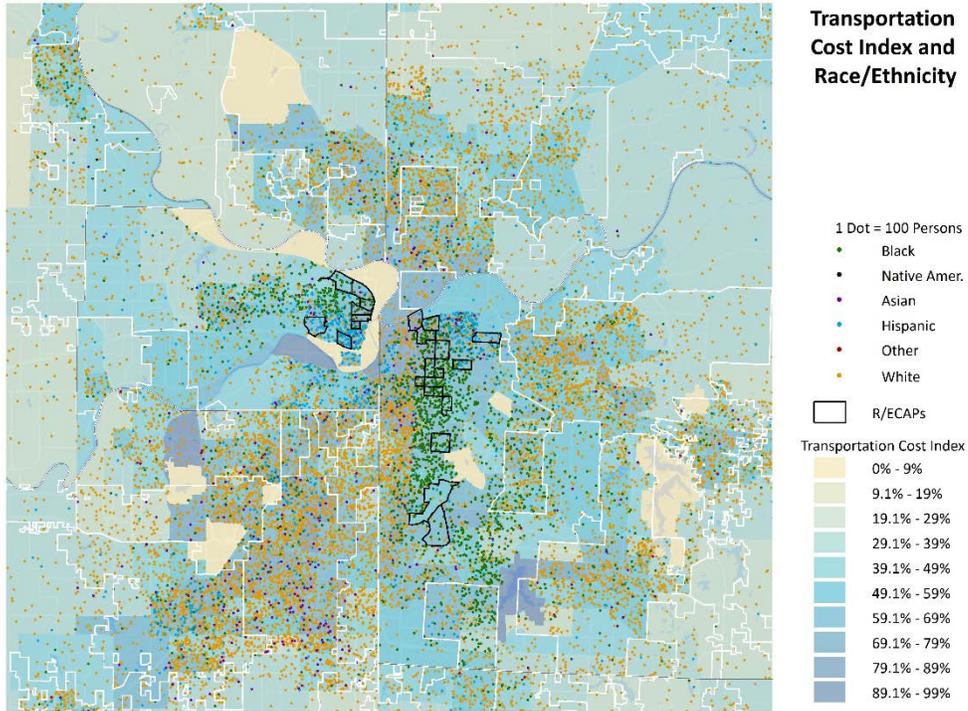
This pattern of transit access and transportation costs reflects that public transit assets are concentrated in the urban core and closely overlap with R/ECAPs (Racially and Ethnically Concentrated Areas of Poverty).

Maps 1 and 2 show that people of color tend to live in census tracts that are better served by public transit than areas with concentration of whites. It should be noted that the Kansas City metro area does not have a robust regional transit system, so the differences by geography are not as great as might be experienced in other metro areas.

**Map 1: Transit Trips Index with Race/Ethnicity**

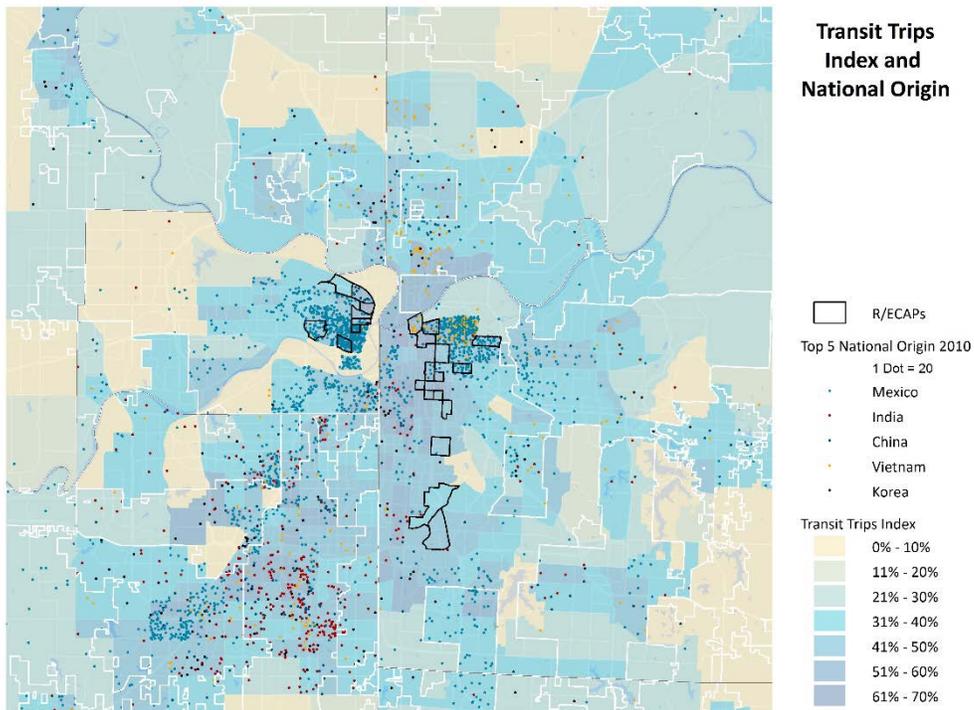


**Map 2: Transportation Cost Index with Race/Ethnicity**

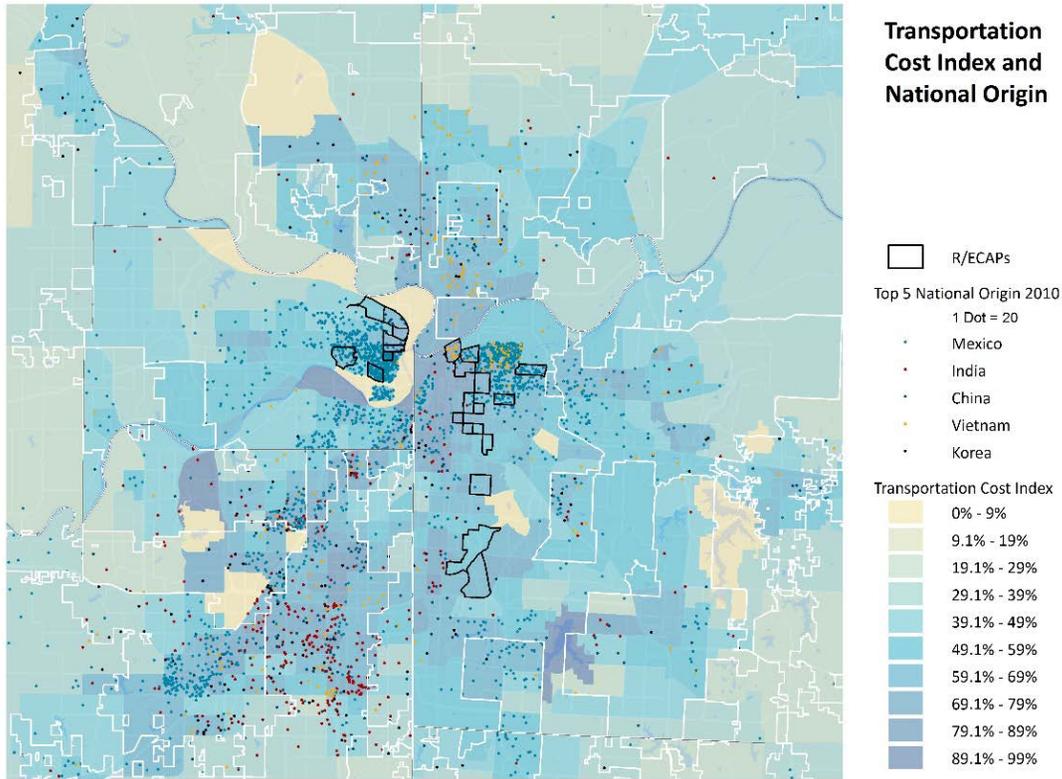


For national origin, Maps 3 and 4 show that people of Mexican origin, the largest group of national origin, coincide to a significant extent with areas with a higher transit index and lower transportation costs.

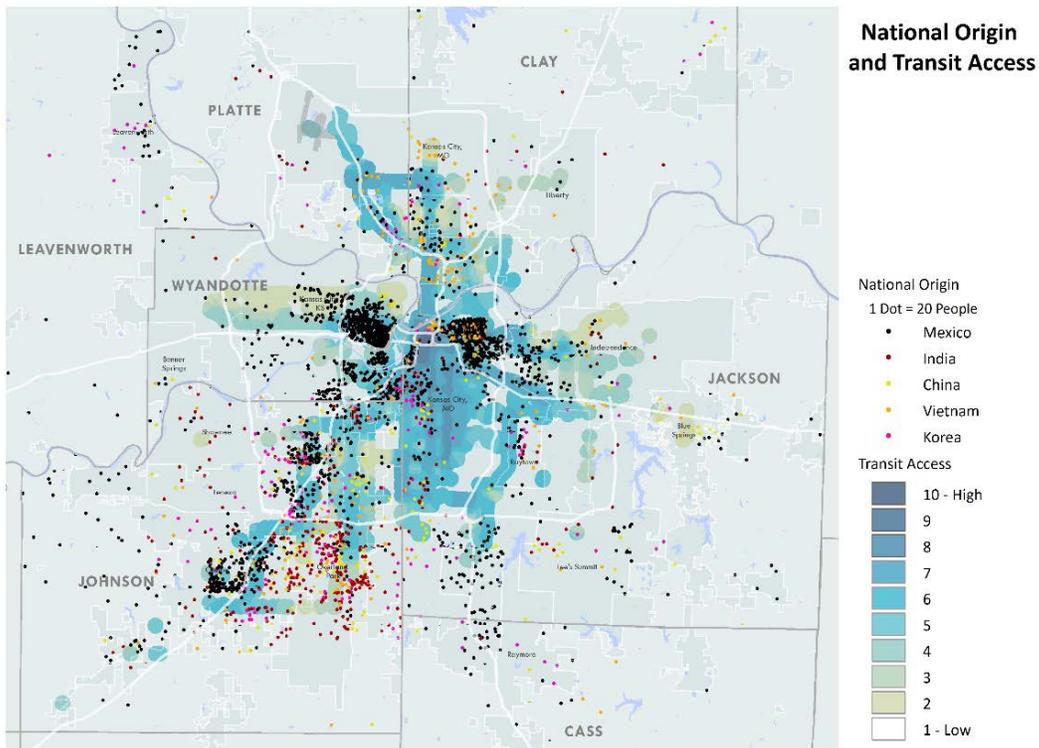
**Map 3: Transit Trips Index with National Origin**



**Map 4: Transportation Cost Index with National Origin**



**Map 5: National Origin and Transit Access**



Map 5 shows the access job centers by public transit is limited in the Kansas City region, particularly in many suburban locations.

**Kansas City, Missouri** — The city of Kansas City, Missouri, is the only city with dedicated funding for public transportation and the only city with transit index scores generally running above regional scores for the total population, by four to nine points. This is also the case for those below the federal poverty line, generally running two to 10 points higher than the regional scores. Lower transportation costs in Kansas City, Missouri, also reflect these differences being lower than the region as a whole, both for the total population and for those below the federal poverty line. This pattern holds for all racial and ethnic groups.

Kansas City, Missouri also has higher transit index scores and lower transportation cost index scores than the other four cities in the regional analysis.

The index scores for different racial and ethnic groups are much closer together than for the region as a whole. The white population has slightly lower scores, but not nearly the difference experienced at the regional level.

**Kansas City, Kansas** — The Kansas City, Kansas, profile is very similar to that of the region as a whole, with slightly higher index scores for residents with incomes below the federal poverty line. The Unified Government provides some general revenue funds for public transportation services, appropriated annually.

**Leavenworth, Independence and Blue Springs** — The profile for these three cities is very flat across racial and ethnic groups for both indexes for the public as a whole. The indexes are lower than they are for the region or the two core cities; however, they vary in how much lower, with Leavenworth being slightly below the regional profile, Independence a little further below, and Blue Springs having the lowest index scores. Low-income residents of these cities follow a similar pattern with the following exceptions: whites, unlike other groups, match the regional numbers and in Leavenworth the transit index score for Asian/Pacific Islanders is substantially lower than the scores for all other groups. Independence and Blue Springs provide some general revenues for public transportation services, appropriated annually.

## Conclusions

- Kansas City, Missouri, with the most robust transit system in the metro area and the greatest concentration of low-income and minority populations has index scores above the regional scores (higher is better).
- In the region and Kansas City, Missouri, and Kansas City, Kansas, people of color have significantly higher index scores than do whites; approximately 10 points higher than whites. However, this difference largely disappears for the cities of Leavenworth, Independence and Blue Springs. To some degree this is because these cities are more homogeneous in terms of geography and transportation services than the two core cities.
- Leavenworth, Independence, and Blue Springs not only have flatter index profiles, but also tend to have lower index scores than the region as a whole. This reflects the less robust transit services provided in these cities, especially in the city of Blue Springs.

## Transit Service

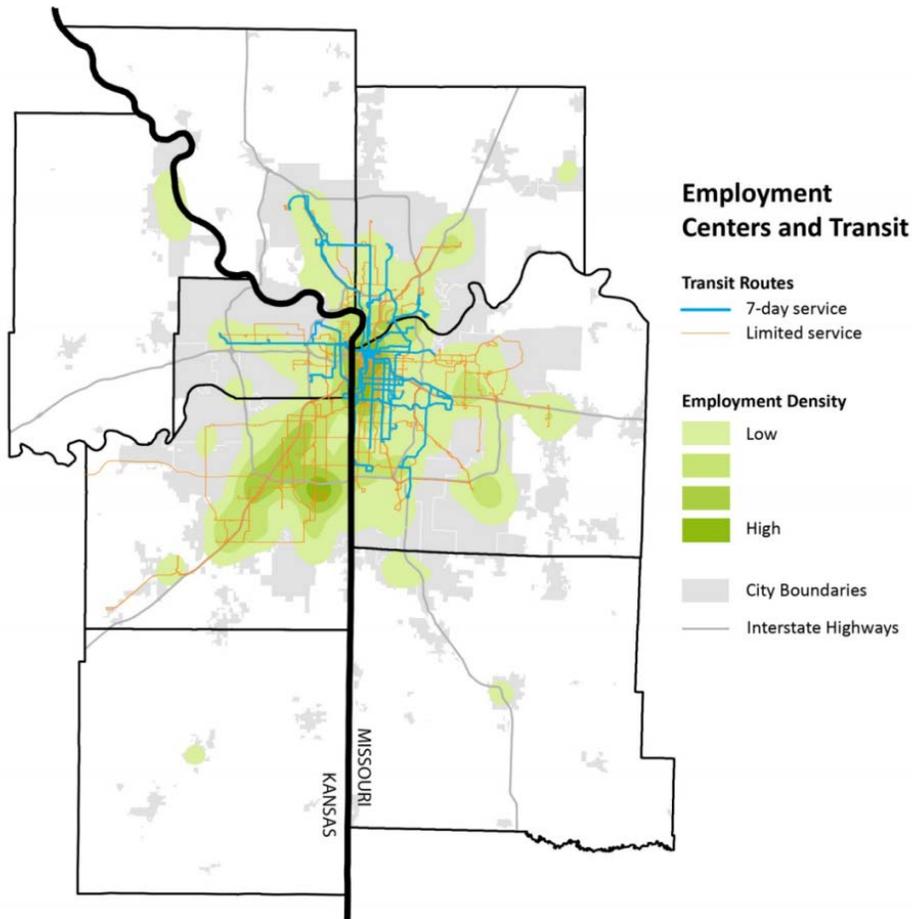
While the information above indicates that people of color have fairly good access to transit in the Kansas City metro area, what the tables and maps do not show is what transit connections are available in terms of jobs, services and educational institutions. It also does not take into account the level of service provided throughout the metro area. Several studies have indicated that transit service, while fairly well connected to concentrations of low-income residents and people of color, does not connect R/ECAPs to opportunity areas, particularly employment centers.

A 2012 Brookings Institute report indicated that the Kansas City metro area ranked 90th out of 100 metropolitan areas in terms of transit access to jobs. This challenge fueled a successful U.S. Department of Transportation TIGER planning grant application by the Mid-America Regional Council.

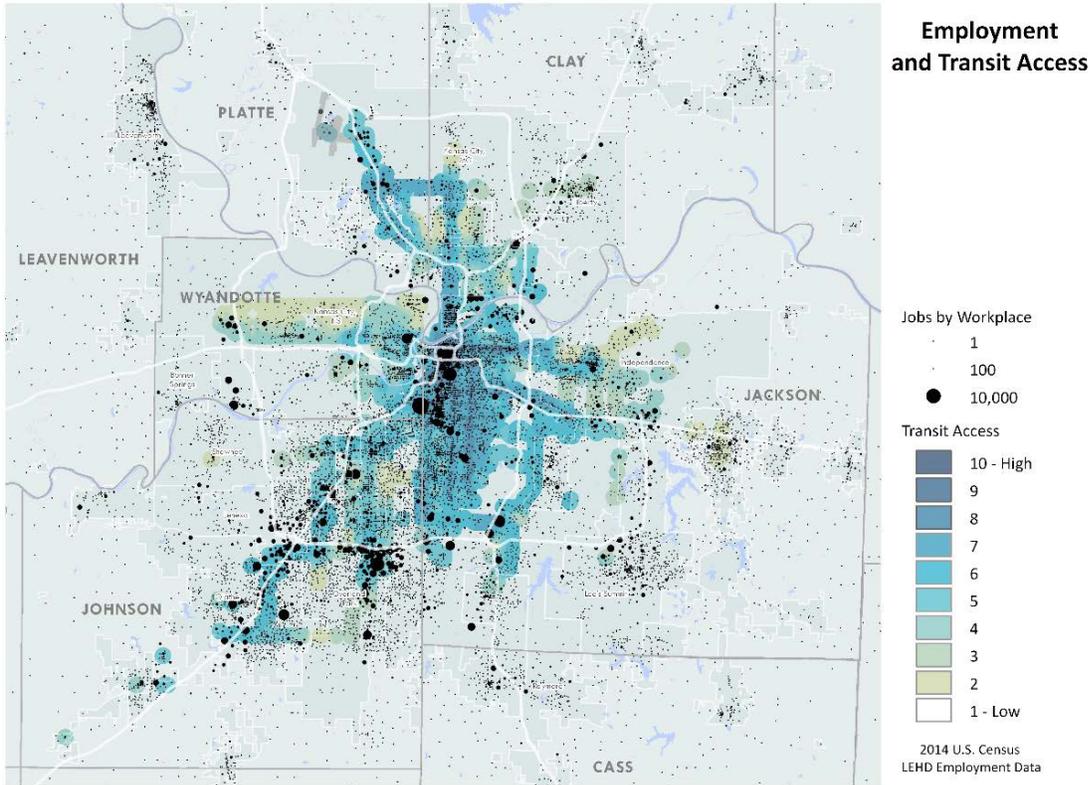
A recent study by the Brookings Institution found that only 18 percent of jobs in the region are reachable via transit in 90 minutes or less — ranking the Kansas City region 90th of the 100 largest metros.

The following two maps illustrate the disconnect between the metro area transit system and jobs.

**Map 6: Employment Centers and Transit**



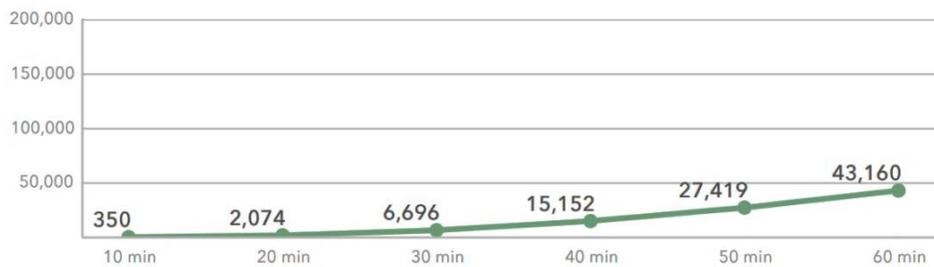
**Map 7: Employment and Transit Access**



Map 6 shows that transit service that connects with some dense job areas is “limited service.” Map 7 shows that many of the jobs in the metro area are not even served by limited transit service. It is also evident that the transit system is north-south oriented, making it more difficult to move from the east, where many low-income, minority populations are concentrated, to job centers in Johnson County to the west.

A report by the University of Minnesota Center for Transportation Studies, “Access Across America: Transit 2014,” found that of almost 1 million jobs in the metro area, only about five percent are accessible with a 60-minute transit trip. The following chart demonstrates the lack of job accessibility.

**Figure 2: Job Accessibility by Travel Time Threshold**



**Kansas City, Missouri** — The city has the most robust public transit system and serves R/ECAP

areas well. It has also invested in bus rapid transit lines serving the urban core and a new starter streetcar line. Unfortunately, because of system fragmentation there is still difficulty making east/west connections to jobs that have moved to the suburbs.

**Kansas City, Kansas** — Kansas City, Kansas, has invested in public transit infrastructure and operates its own transit system. In the last 20 years, a large employment center has developed in its western reaches, but there is not frequent public transit service to this area. It would be difficult for the city to build a robust transit system on its own; rather, it will be dependent on the development of an enhanced regional public transit system.

**Independence** — The city of Independence recently established its own transit system, IndeBus, to improve service within its boundaries. It has invested in transit infrastructure, but still suffers from lack of connections to other parts of the metro area.

**Leavenworth and Blue Springs** — These communities have limited transit service. This is reflected in their lower transit index scores.

## Conclusions

- The chief issue for public transportation is that it does not connect to most of the region's jobs. This adversely impacts people of color and low-income residents who have a difficult time accessing potential employment opportunities.
- In outlying communities such as Leavenworth and Blue Springs, transit services are minimal. For growing populations of people in poverty and of color, this lack of public transportation restricts their ability to access employment opportunities.

## Regional Context

Since the 1950s, the metropolitan area has had expansive highway planning and construction programs, which facilitated the movement of businesses and households farther and farther out. This has depleted the core of families and opportunities and made it more difficult for families in the core, primarily people of color and the poor to access the jobs that have now moved out to the edge of the metro area. Due to current fiscal constraints at the state level in both Kansas and Missouri, plans to expand the region's highway system have slowed; however, significant federal and state resources are still anticipated to be required to maintain and operate this system.

At the same time, the metropolitan area has funded its public transit system through a patchwork of local funding and multiple service providers. There are several reasons for this. First, much of the metropolitan area lacks the density to effectively support public transit. Second, the metro area is politically fragmented, which has made coordination of services and funding transit services difficult. There are currently five different transit systems serving the metro area. While significant recent progress has been made to coordinate services across these providers, funding for the transit system and regional service levels remain low compared with peer metropolitan areas.

Some of the effects of these past policies are reflected in the data provided in the previous section. For example, the lack of east/west public transit routes is a direct result of fragmentation.

However, in the last 10 years the metro area has begun to work more closely on building a more efficient transportation system that expands accessibility across the region and enhances connections between R/ECAPs and opportunity areas. This began with a regional transportation plan that adopted at its base a more compact land-use goal and a focus on key corridors. This was followed up by the HUD-funded Creating Sustainable Places initiative, which developed a number of strategies to promote more housing choices and transportation alternatives. This included a commitment of transportation dollars for sustainable community projects and a regional FHEA that identified R/ECAPs, opportunity areas and ways to connect the two.

There is also a new initiative to enhance coordination among area transit systems through a Regional Transit Coordinating Council. The cities of Kansas City, Missouri, Kansas City, Kansas, and Independence are all a part of this initiative. MARC is currently working on a study funded by a TIGER planning grant to identify new public transit strategies to double access to jobs by transit over the next 10 years. In addition, cities have made new investments in public transportation, including bus rapid transit lines and a new streetcar line Kansas City, Missouri, and investments in transit infrastructure in a number of communities, including Kansas City, Kansas, and Independence.

Local communities have been generally supportive of public transportation. However, because of the region's fragmentation it is difficult for any single community to provide adequate public transportation services on its own. Kansas City, Missouri, is the only city that has a dedicated tax just for public transportation and this is reflected the comparatively better transit service it offers its residents. However, if people of color and low-income residents, particularly those living in R/ECAPs, are going to have access to a wider range of job and other opportunities, it will require a more robust regional transportation system.

## Conclusions

- The Kansas City metro area has a long history of expanding highways outward, facilitating the spread of employment centers and households and abandonment of the urban core, making it difficult for low-income residents and people of color left in the R/ECAP areas to access the opportunities that have moved to the suburbs.
- Over the last 10 years the metro area has started to change its policies looking for ways to better integrate its regional transit systems, redevelop corridors that link R/ECAPs and opportunity areas, and encourage development that affords all residents more opportunities.
- A more robust regional transit system that allows residents, no matter where they live, to access jobs and other opportunities will require both increased local funding and support and stronger regional partnerships.