

FHWA NHTS BRIEF

2014



Mobility Challenges for Households in Poverty

2009 National Household Travel Survey

- Households in poverty spend a higher proportion of their income on transportation expenses and are disproportionately represented by race/ethnicity with African-Americans and Hispanics experiencing the highest poverty rates. Limited vehicle availability and fewer affordable transportation options afflict this cost-sensitive group.
- Households in poverty are limited to a shorter radius of travel compared to higher income households. They have the lowest rates of single occupancy vehicle use and the highest usage of less costly travel modes: carpool, transit, bike and walk.
- Households in poverty have lower vehicle ownership rates, which has led to an increased use of alternative modes of transportation and higher vehicle occupancy rates.
- The 2009 National Household Travel Survey shows that in the metropolitan areas of Atlanta and Los Angeles, those in poverty have a smaller radius of travel than those in the highest income group. In New York City, however, the working poor tend to have a larger radius of travel than workers with the highest incomes, which is likely indicative of its very affluent urban core.

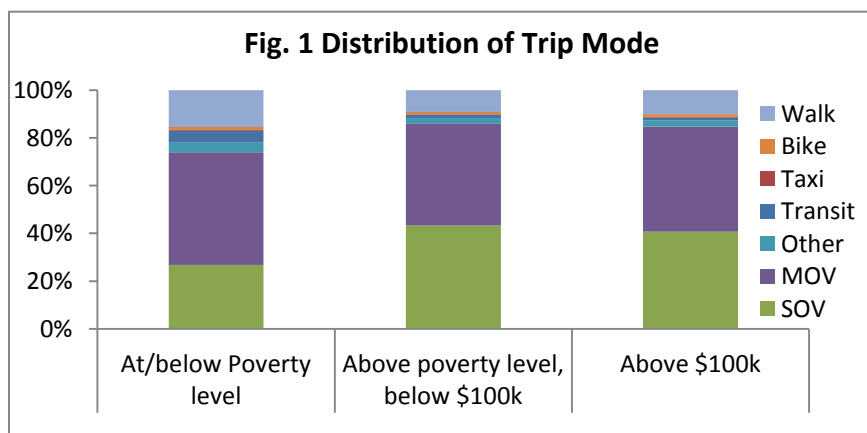
Studies have shown that rising transportation costs have a disproportionate negative impact on lower income households. The Bureau of Labor Statistic's Consumer Expenditure Survey has shown that transportation is the second highest American household expenditure, only exceeded by housing costsⁱ. The high sticker price of vehicles, increased prices at the pump, and transit fare hikes all pose a financial burden to the mobility of all households, especially those in poverty.

In 2009, the year of the most recent NHTS, the Census Bureau reported that the nation's official overall poverty rate was 14.3 percent whereas 25.8 percent of Blacks and 25.3 percent of Hispanics were in poverty. In 2012, the Census poverty numbers changed slightly with poverty rates of 27.2 percent and 25.6 for Blacks and Hispanics respectively.ⁱⁱ These vulnerable groups are in need of cost-effective transportation options that are affordable and provide them access to job opportunities.

2009 Poverty Status of Selected Groups

	People in Poverty	Percent in Poverty
White	29,830,000	12.3
White, not Hispanic	18,530,000	9.4
Black	9,944,000	25.8
Asian	1,746,000	12.5
Hispanic origin	12,350,000	25.3

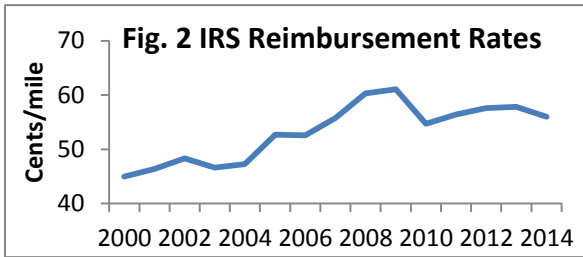
Data Source: www.census.gov



Data Source: 2009 FHWA NHTS

Figure 1 shows that individuals in poverty take about three times as many transit trips as those in the higher income groups. They also have the greatest rate of bike trips and take walk trips about 50% more than their higher income counterparts. When using personal vehicles, individuals in poverty are about twice as likely to travel in a multi-occupant vehicle

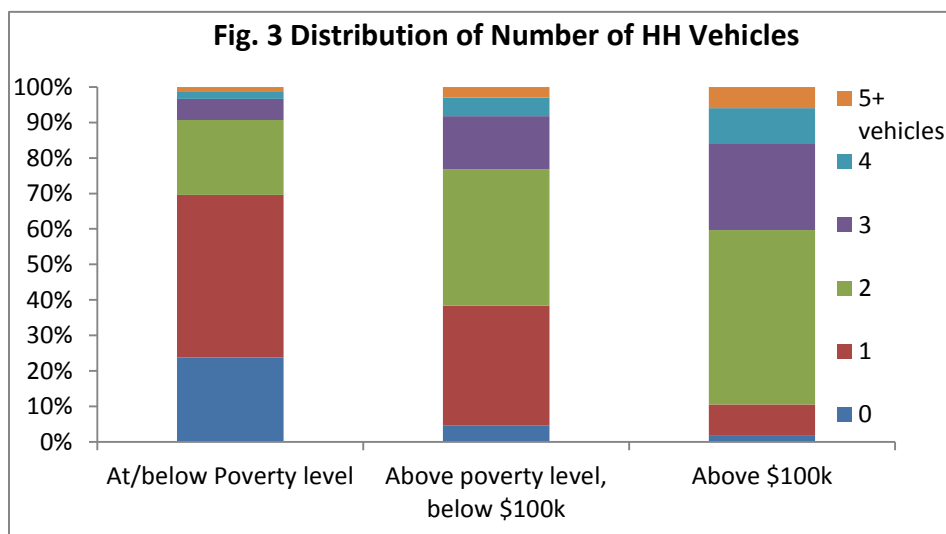
(MOV) than a single occupant vehicle (SOV). Average vehicle occupancy for those at or below poverty level is 2.37 persons per vehicle mile versus 2.07 for those with incomes above \$100,000.



Data Source: www.irs.gov

The Internal Revenue Service vehicle mileage reimbursement ratesⁱⁱⁱ since 2000 display an overall increase in the per mile cost of driving (Figure 2 - indexed to 2014 dollars), which is indicative of one of the cost obstacles to personal vehicle ownership and maintenance. 2009 NHTS data shows vehicle ownership increasing with household income as shown in Figure 3. About 24 percent of households in poverty do not own a vehicle while over 98 percent of \$100,000+ households own at least one vehicle.

Diversity-rich metropolitan areas can display even larger disparities in the travel trends between those in poverty and their higher income counterparts.



Data Source: 2009 FHWA NHTS

those in poverty and their higher income counterparts. In the cities of Atlanta, Los Angeles and New York City, individuals in the \$100,000+ income group travel 14, 12.8, and 3.36 more daily miles respectively than those in poverty (Figures 4a-c). For those who are workers and drivers, (Figure 5) the person

miles traveled told a different story. In New York City, wealthier worker-drivers traveled significantly fewer miles than those in poverty likely due to their ability to afford to live in the very expensive urban core. The greater sprawl in housing and employment in Atlanta and Los Angeles allowed for a smaller difference between income groups for worker-driver travel (Fig 5) and all person travel. (Fig. 4)

Fig. 4 Daily Travel Radius of all persons

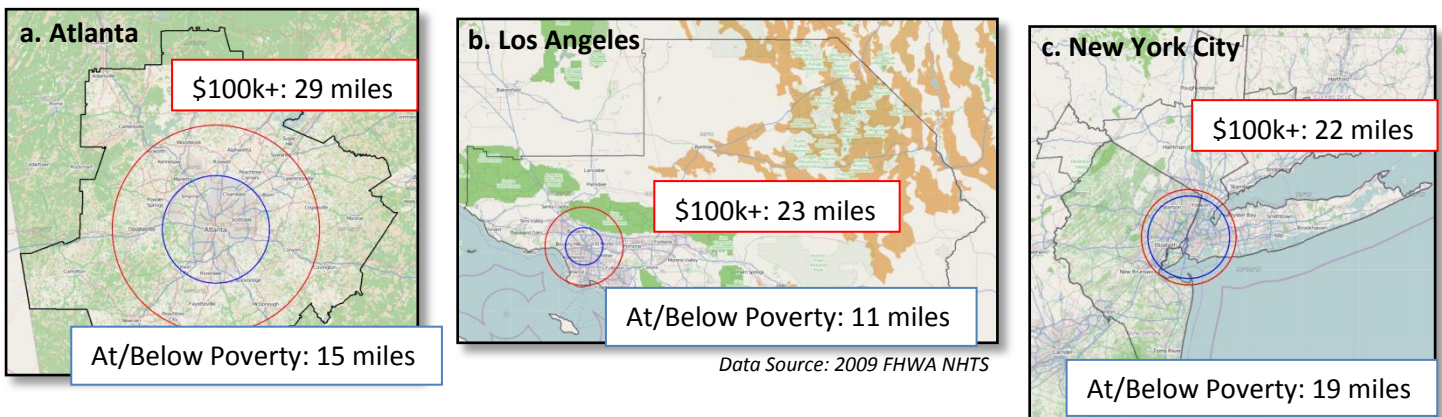
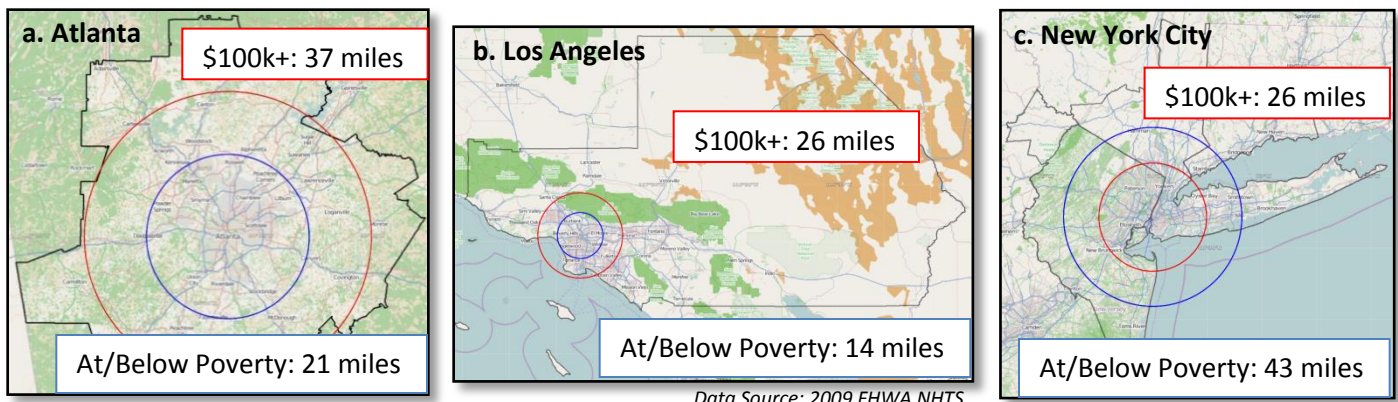


Fig. 5 Daily Travel Radius of Workers who are licensed drivers



The geography of poverty is also changing. More U.S. households in poverty live in suburbs than in big cities or rural communities. The concentrated poverty rate is still highest in big cities, where almost one in four poor residents (23 percent) lived in a distressed neighborhood between 2008-2012, compared to 6.3 percent in suburbs. Suburban communities, however, experienced the largest change in the number of residents living in concentrated poverty. Between 2000 and 2012, the number of suburban poor living in distressed neighborhoods grew by 139 percent—almost three times the pace of ^{iv} growth in cities. These suburban poor neighborhoods face many

Fig. 6 Statistics on Poverty

- Almost one out of sixteen people in the USA are living in deep poverty.
- Racial and ethnic minorities, women, children, and families headed by single women are particularly vulnerable to poverty and deep poverty.
- Blacks and Hispanics are more likely than whites to be poor, and to be in poverty and deep poverty. Poverty is a women's issue; female-headed families are more likely to be poor.
- Children represent more than one-third of the people living in poverty.
- Over one-fourth of adults with a disability live in poverty.

challenges: Poor health, high crime, low-performing schools, and low job density, which make it especially difficult to climb out of poverty and allow the community to develop and grow in sustainable ways. ^v Transportation becomes an even greater problem since

suburban neighborhoods have fewer transit options compared to more densely populated urban areas.

The suburbs have also historically been a draw for families with children, which leads to concerns about childhood poverty and children's travel needs. National 2009 NHTS averages show that households with children tend to travel over twice as much as those without children. Trips to daycare, school, doctor's appointments, and social activities add a significant number of miles to family households. In New York City, however, households in poverty who live with children travel significantly less than their childless counterparts. Improving mobility and job accessibility are very important factors for households to escape poverty. As transportation costs continue to rise, poor households will have an increasing burden with expenses that are necessary to meet basic needs and improve quality of life.

For more information, please visit our Website: <http://nhts.ornl.gov>

Or Contact:

Adella Santos, Program Manager, FHWA, DOT
Phone: 202-366-5021
Email: adella.santos@dot.gov

Jasmy Methipara, Program Analyst
Phone: 202-366-4073
Email: jasmy.methipara.ctr@dot.gov

Susan Liss, Survey Strategist
Email: susan.liss.ctr@dot.gov

Tim Reuscher, Statistical Analyst
Email: reuschertr@ornl.gov

About the National Household Travel Survey

Conducted periodically by the USDOT FHWA since 1969, the survey collects travel data from a sample of U.S. households. The information has been used to understand trends in the nation's trip making and miles of travel by mode, purpose, and time-of-day for use in policy, planning and safety.

Data is collected for household members and for each day of the year, yielding a rich demographic profile linked to daily travel and vehicle characteristics.

ⁱ "CONSUMER EXPENDITURES--2012." BLS Economic News Release 10 Sept. 2013. Web. 4 Sept. 2014. <<http://www.bls.gov/news.release/cesan.nr0.htm>>.

ⁱⁱ DeNavas-Walt, Carmen, Bernadette D. Proctor, and Jessica C. Smith. "Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2012 Current Population Reports." United States Census Bureau P60-245 (2013). Web. <<http://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/p60-245.pdf>>.

ⁱⁱⁱ "Standard Mileage Rates." [Http://www.irs.gov/Tax-Professionals/Standard-Mileage-Rates](http://www.irs.gov/Tax-Professionals/Standard-Mileage-Rates). 1 May 2014. Web. 4 Sept. 2014. <<http://www.irs.gov/Tax-Professionals/Standard-Mileage-Rates>>.

^{iv} "Poverty in the United States: A Snapshot." National Center for Law and Economic Justice. 1 Sept. 2013. Web. 4 Sept. 2014. <<http://www.nclj.org/poverty-in-the-us.php>>.

^v Kneebone, Elizabeth. "The Growth and Spread of Concentrated Poverty, 2000 to 2008-2012." Brookings. 31 July 2014. Web. 4 Sept. 2014. <<http://www.brookings.edu/research/interactives/2014/concentrated-poverty#/M10420>>.