

# Commuting by Public Transportation in the United States: 2019

American Community Survey Reports

By Michael Burrows, Charlynn Burd, and Brian McKenzie  
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According to the American Community Survey (ACS), public transportation commuters constituted about 5 percent of all workers in the United States in 2019.<sup>1</sup> Though public transportation (transit) was a relatively uncommon method of traveling to work in the United States as a whole, it played a prominent role in certain places, like the cities of New York, where over 2 million people commuted by public transportation, and San Francisco, where over one-third of workers did so.<sup>2</sup> Trends in transit commuting varied in 2019 by region, metropolitan area (metro), and certain notable demographic characteristics. This report describes the status of public transportation commuting in the United States, beginning with the distribution of public transportation commuters across different transit modes, proceeding to summarize key geographic and demographic patterns, and concluding with a glimpse at historical trends in public transportation. The 2019 ACS 1-year estimates collected commuting data throughout calendar year 2019; therefore, these data necessarily reflect the situation prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. These data will provide a baseline for understanding the impact of the pandemic and of the resulting economic crisis and recession that began in early 2020.

<sup>1</sup> The U.S. Census Bureau reviewed this data product for unauthorized disclosure of confidential information and approved the disclosure avoidance practices applied to this release. CBDRB-FY20-POP001-0182.

<sup>2</sup> See 2019 American Community Survey 1-year estimates Table S0802 (with a geographic filter for New York) and S0801 (with a geographic filter for San Francisco).

## MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION TO WORK IN THE ACS

The ACS is conducted annually by the U.S. Census Bureau to gather information about the socioeconomic, housing, and demographic characteristics of communities across the United States.<sup>3</sup> The ACS asks respondents who worked in the last week about their primary means of transportation to work. Respondents select from a list the method they used for the longest distance in their typical trip to work (Figure 1).<sup>4</sup>

The five public transportation modes included on this list: bus; subway or elevated rail; long-distance train or commuter rail; light rail, streetcar, or trolley; and ferryboat—combined to form a group of about 7.8 million people, or 5 percent of all U.S. workers in 2019 (Table 1). Public transportation was less common than driving alone (reported by 75.9 percent of workers), carpooling (8.9 percent), and working from home (5.7 percent). While driving alone and carpooling have been the two most common means of transportation to work since the ACS began collecting commuting information, the share of workers that worked from home first exceeded the share that commuted by public transportation in 2017.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Estimates for Puerto Rico are not included in this report.

<sup>4</sup> Public transportation categories were updated in 2019 to better reflect contemporary nomenclature. More information on the update is available at <[www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2017/acs/2017\\_McKenzie\\_01.pdf](http://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2017/acs/2017_McKenzie_01.pdf)>.

<sup>5</sup> See 2017 American Community Survey 1-year estimates Table S0801 for these and other statistics about commuting to work in the United States.

The largest group of public transportation commuters (46.3 percent of all public transportation commuters, or about 3.6 million people) reported the bus as their primary commuting mode (Figure 2). Subway or elevated rail was the next most-common mode, at 37.7 percent of public transportation commuters. Long-distance train or commuter rail carried 11.8 percent of transit commuters, and 3.1 percent traveled by light rail, streetcar, or trolley. The least-used mode of public transit in 2019 was ferryboat, used by 1.0 percent of transit commuters, or around 77,000 people.

### PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION COMMUTING BY AGE AND SEX

Commuting by public transportation was somewhat more common in 2019 among women and younger workers. Women made up a smaller share of the overall workforce, but because a larger percentage of women than men commuted by public transportation (5.2 percent compared to 4.7 percent), a roughly even quantity of men and women rode transit to work in 2019.<sup>6</sup> Workers aged 25 to 29 commuted to work by public transportation at relatively high percentages compared to other age groups (Figure 3). About 7 percent of women aged 25 to 29 commuted by public transportation in 2019, higher than the 6.3 percent of men in the same age group. Among workers aged 35 to 44, statistically even shares of men and women commuted

<sup>6</sup> See 2019 American Community Survey 1-year estimates Table S0801.

Figure 1.  
**Question on Travel Mode from the 2019 American Community Survey**

**32** How did this person usually get to work LAST WEEK? Mark (X) ONE box for the method of transportation used for most of the distance.

<input type="checkbox"/> Car, truck, or van	<input type="checkbox"/> Taxicab
<input type="checkbox"/> Bus	<input type="checkbox"/> Motorcycle
<input type="checkbox"/> Subway or elevated rail	<input type="checkbox"/> Bicycle
<input type="checkbox"/> Long-distance train or commuter rail	<input type="checkbox"/> Walked
<input type="checkbox"/> Light rail, streetcar, or trolley	<input type="checkbox"/> Worked from home → SKIP to question 40a
<input type="checkbox"/> Ferryboat	<input type="checkbox"/> Other method

Note: For more information, see <[www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/methodology/questionnaire-archive.html](http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/methodology/questionnaire-archive.html)>.  
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey.

Table 1.  
**Means of Transportation to Work in the United States: 2019**

(Workers 16 years and over. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see <[www.census.gov/acs](http://www.census.gov/acs)>)

Means of transportation	Number	Margin of error (±)	Percent	Margin of error (±)
<b>Total</b> .....	<b>156,941,346</b>	<b>161,399</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>0.1</b>
Car, truck, or van. ....	133,054,328	173,377	84.8	0.1
Drove alone. ....	119,153,349	145,368	75.9	0.1
Carpooled. ....	13,900,979	82,351	8.9	0.1
Public transportation. ....	7,778,444	42,450	5.0	0.1
Bus. ....	3,601,403	34,897	2.3	0.1
Subway or elevated rail ..	2,935,633	29,091	1.9	0.1
Long-distance train or commuter rail .....	921,391	17,465	0.6	0.1
Light rail, streetcar, or trolley .....	242,776	8,667	0.2	0.1
Ferryboat .....	77,241	5,055	0.0	0.1
Taxicab .....	385,756	13,467	0.2	0.1
Motorcycle .....	221,923	7,785	0.1	0.1
Bicycle .....	805,722	19,868	0.5	0.1
Walked. ....	4,153,050	43,355	2.6	0.1
Other means .....	1,571,323	27,465	1.0	0.1
Worked from home .....	8,970,800	53,611	5.7	0.1

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey, 1-year estimates.

by public transportation, but among workers aged 45 and over, the share of women commuting by transit was consistently higher than men. Among

both men and women, the share of workers commuting by public transportation generally declined with age, though more markedly for men than

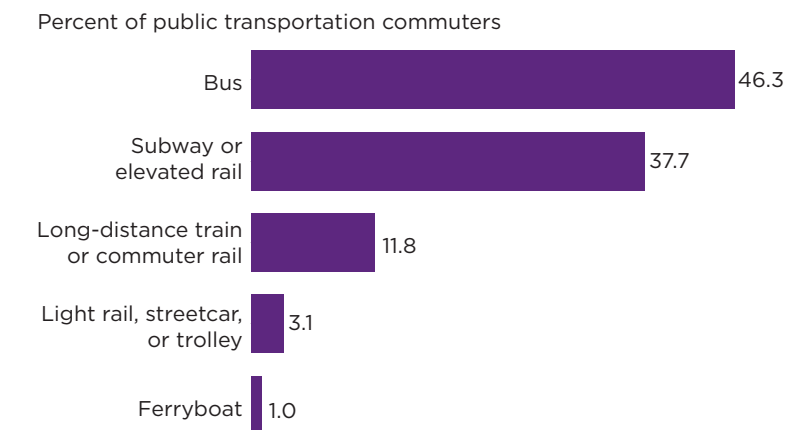
for women. For example, about the same percentage of women aged 45 to 49 as aged 60 to 64 commuted by public transportation (4.5 and 4.6 percent, respectively, and not statistically different). Across these same two age groups, the percentage of men commuting by transit declined from 4.1 to 3.6 percent. Workers aged 65 and over commuted by public transportation at the lowest percentages of any age group among both men and women (3.1 and 4.0 percent, respectively).

### VARIATION BY REGION AND COMMUNITY TYPE

Public transportation commuting followed distinct geographical patterns in 2019. In the

Figure 2.  
**Means of Transportation to Work Among U.S. Transit Commuters: 2019**

(Workers 16 years and over who commute by public transportation)



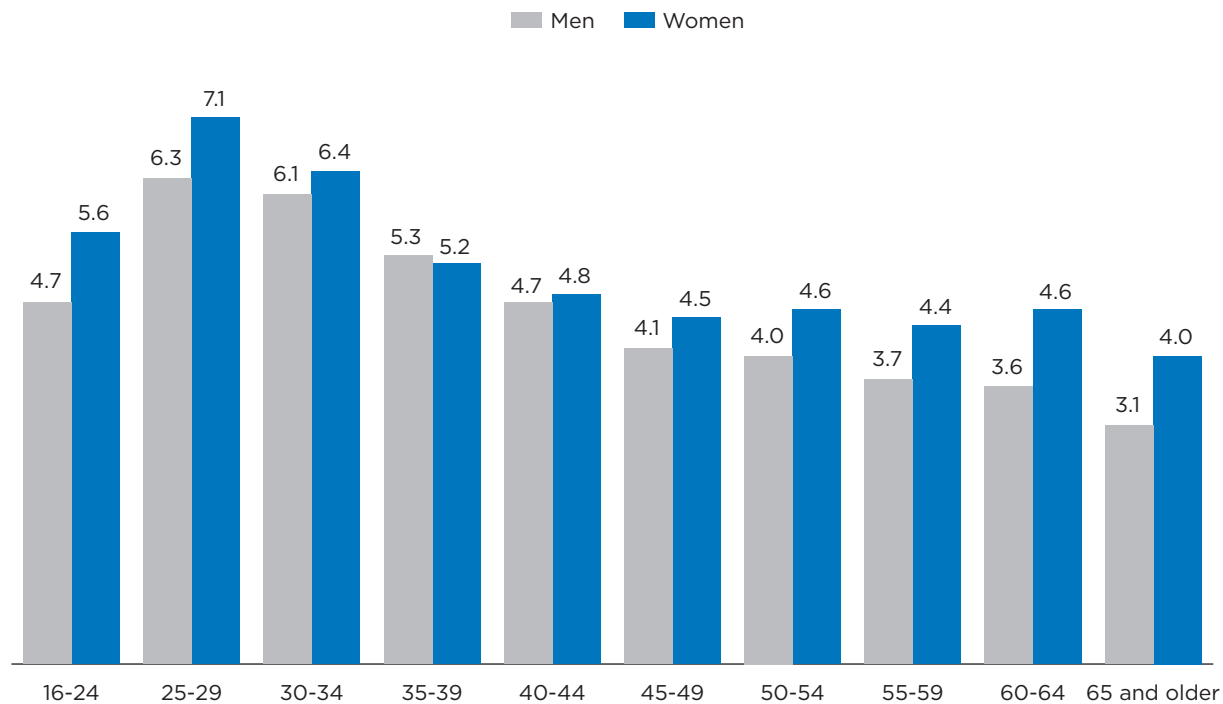
Note: Total may not sum to 100 due to rounding. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see <[www.census.gov/acs](http://www.census.gov/acs)>.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey, 1-year estimates.

Figure 3.

### Percent of Workers Commuting by Public Transportation by Age and Sex: 2019

(Workers 16 years and over)



Note: For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see <[www.census.gov/acs](http://www.census.gov/acs)>.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey, 1-year estimates.

Northeast, 14.3 percent of workers commuted by transit (Figure 4). The next largest share was in the West (4.4 percent), followed by the Midwest (3.0 percent). The region with the lowest percentage of workers commuting by transit was the South, at 2.0 percent.

Although bus riders made up the largest group of transit commuters nationally, the most widely used mode of transit in the Northeast was subway or elevated rail, reported by 54.1 percent of the region's public transportation commuters (Table 2). Since the Northeast contains several metropolitan areas with robust subway and elevated rail systems, such as New York, Philadelphia, and

Boston, this result is in line with expectations. Traveling by long-distance train or commuter rail was also more common in the Northeast than in the South or West regions, at 14.1 percent of public transportation commuters. The share of transit commuters traveling by long-distance train or commuter rail was highest in the Midwest, at 16.3 percent of that region's transit commuters, driven by the Chicago metropolitan area. A larger percentage of transit commuters traveled by bus in the West (where cities generally have less extensive rail networks) than in any other region, at 67.2 percent.

The largest shares of workers commuting by transit were

found in each region's principal cities.<sup>7</sup> In principal cities of the Northeast, 35.5 percent of workers commuted by public transportation (Figure 4). In the South, the corresponding share was just 3.5 percent. Public transportation commuting was least common outside of metro areas. The share of workers living outside metro areas who commuted by transit was highest in the West, where 1.2

<sup>7</sup> Metropolitan statistical areas have at least one urbanized area of 50,000 or more inhabitants. The largest city in each metropolitan statistical area is designated a "principal city." Additional cities within the metropolitan area can also qualify as principal cities if specified requirements are met concerning population size and employment. "Outside of metro areas" includes micropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas. For more information about metropolitan statistical areas, see <[www.census.gov/programs-surveys/metro-micro/about.html](http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/metro-micro/about.html)>.

Table 2.

### Distribution of U.S. Public Transportation Commuters Across Travel Modes by Region and Geographic Subdivision: 2019

(Workers 16 years and over who commute by public transportation. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see <[www.census.gov/acs/](http://www.census.gov/acs/)>)

Geography	Bus		Subway or elevated rail		Long-distance train or commuter rail		Light rail, streetcar, or trolley		Ferryboat	
	Percent	Margin of error (±)	Percent	Margin of error (±)	Percent	Margin of error (±)	Percent	Margin of error (±)	Percent	Margin of error (±)
<b>United States</b> .....	<b>46.3</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>37.7</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>11.8</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>0.1</b>
Metro area, principal city.....	45.1	0.4	46.5	0.4	4.9	0.2	2.9	0.1	0.6	0.1
Metro area, elsewhere .....	47.2	0.6	20.1	0.5	27.3	0.5	3.8	0.2	1.7	0.2
Outside metro area.....	89.1	1.3	3.9	0.9	3.6	0.8	0.6	0.4	2.8	0.8
<b>Northeast</b> .....	<b>29.4</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>54.1</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>14.1</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>0.1</b>
Metro area, principal city.....	26.2	0.6	68.0	0.7	4.3	0.3	0.9	0.1	0.6	0.1
Metro area, elsewhere .....	37.2	0.9	19.0	0.7	39.4	0.8	2.9	0.3	1.6	0.2
Outside metro area.....	65.9	5.2	17.7	5.0	13.2	3.9	0.4	0.5	2.9	1.8
<b>Midwest</b> .....	<b>58.9</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>22.2</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>16.3</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>0.1</b>
Metro area, principal city.....	63.3	1.0	27.9	1.0	6.4	0.5	2.2	0.3	0.2	0.1
Metro area, elsewhere .....	45.8	1.4	10.9	1.0	40.1	1.7	2.9	0.6	0.3	0.1
Outside metro area.....	92.2	2.5	2.9	1.5	1.7	1.0	0.4	0.4	2.7	1.5
<b>South</b> .....	<b>63.8</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>27.2</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>5.7</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>0.1</b>
Metro area, principal city.....	67.9	1.2	26.0	1.1	2.7	0.3	3.2	0.4	0.3	0.1
Metro area, elsewhere .....	57.2	1.4	29.9	1.2	9.7	0.8	2.6	0.6	0.5	0.2
Outside metro area.....	89.6	3.6	2.4	1.5	3.7	2.2	1.8	1.6	2.5	1.6
<b>West</b> .....	<b>67.2</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>15.1</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>7.7</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>0.2</b>
Metro area, principal city.....	70.0	0.9	13.9	0.6	6.7	0.5	8.3	0.5	1.2	0.2
Metro area, elsewhere .....	59.7	1.3	18.4	1.2	10.9	0.7	7.2	0.6	3.8	0.5
Outside metro area.....	94.2	1.8	1.0	0.9	1.8	1.0	0.0	0.5	3.0	1.2

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey, 1-year estimates.

percent of workers living outside of metros commuted by some form of public transportation in 2019. Outside of the South's metro areas, 0.3 percent of workers commuted by transit.

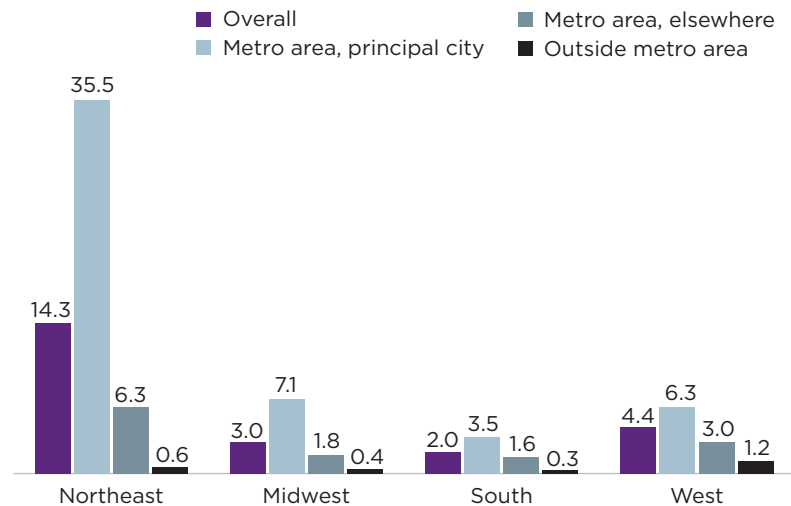
Together, these regional patterns contributed to stark differences at the national level in transit commuting by community type (Figure 5). Outside of U.S. metros, 0.5 percent of workers commuted by public transportation, compared to 2.9 percent of workers in metro areas outside of a principal city and 5.6 percent of workers within metro areas.

In the largest cities of U.S. metro areas, where transit networks are typically denser and regular service more feasible, 11.5 percent of workers commuted by transit. However, differences even within this subset of communities were vast. Within the seven metropolitan statistical areas that were home to over 250,000 public transportation commuters (a group of metros that will be referred to as “seven transit-heavy metros”), 16.9 percent of workers commuted by public transportation.<sup>8</sup> Within the largest cities of these seven transit-heavy metros, over a third of workers commuted by transit in 2019.

<sup>8</sup> The seven transit-heavy metro areas considered in this analysis are the Boston-Cambridge-Newton, MA-NH Metro Area; the Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN-WI Metro Area; the Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA Metro Area; the New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ-PA Metro Area; the Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington, PA-NJ-DE-MD Metro Area; the San Francisco-Oakland-Berkeley, CA Metro Area; and the Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV Metro Area.

Figure 4.  
**Percent of Workers Commuting by Public Transportation by Region and Geographic Subdivision: 2019**

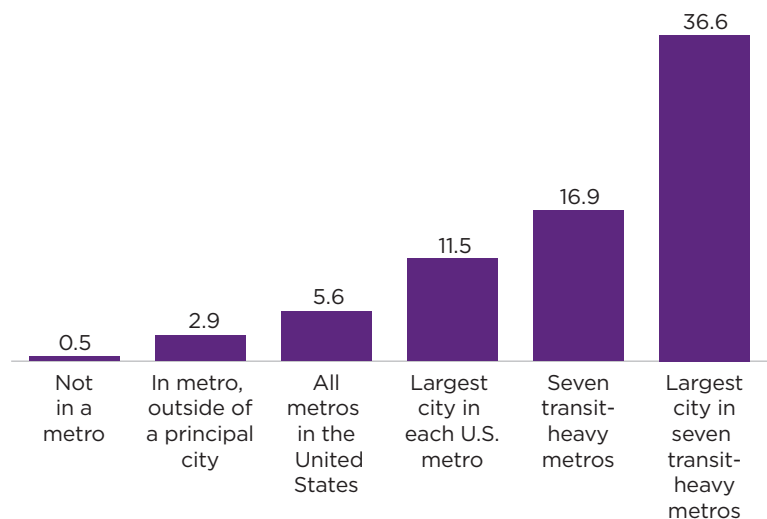
(Workers 16 years and over)



Note: For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see <[www.census.gov/acs](http://www.census.gov/acs)>. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey, 1-year estimates.

Figure 5.  
**Percent of Workers Commuting by Public Transportation Across Geographies: 2019**

(Workers 16 years and over)



Note: For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see <[www.census.gov/acs](http://www.census.gov/acs)>. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey, 1-year estimates.

## PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION COMMUTING IN LARGE METRO AREAS

About 70 percent of metro-based transit commuters (public transportation commuters living in U.S. metro areas) lived in one of the seven transit-heavy metros presented in Figure 6, Panel B. Three of these seven transit-heavy metros are situated in the Northeast, which as a region was home to more than half of the nation's public transportation commuters in 2019.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The three transit-heavy metro areas located in the Northeast are the Boston-Cambridge-Newton, MA-NH Metro Area; the New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ-PA Metro Area; and the Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington, PA-NJ-DE-MD Metro Area.

Table 3 provides additional detail on the seven transit-heavy metro areas and 18 others with high numbers of transit commuters, as well as their largest cities. Generally, the percentage of workers commuting by public transportation was higher in the largest city of a metro than within the broader metro area.

Nearly 32 percent of workers in the New York Metro Area, and 55.6 percent of workers in New York City, commuted by some form of public transportation in 2019. Notably, of the public transportation commuters who lived within U.S. metro areas, 38.7 percent resided in the New York-Newark-Jersey City,

NY-NJ-PA Metro Area.<sup>10</sup> Stated differently, the New York metro area is home to roughly 3 million of the nation's 7.8 million public transportation commuters.

Another 21.0 percent of U.S. transit commuters lived in the West, including the 6.0 percent of metro-based transit commuters from the San Francisco-Oakland-Berkeley, CA Metro Area. About 19 percent of workers in the San Francisco Metro Area commuted

<sup>10</sup> The first city listed in the name of the metropolitan statistical area is always the largest. For example, in the New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ-PA Metro Area, New York is the largest city; correspondingly, in the Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV Metro Area, Washington is the largest city.

Figure 6.

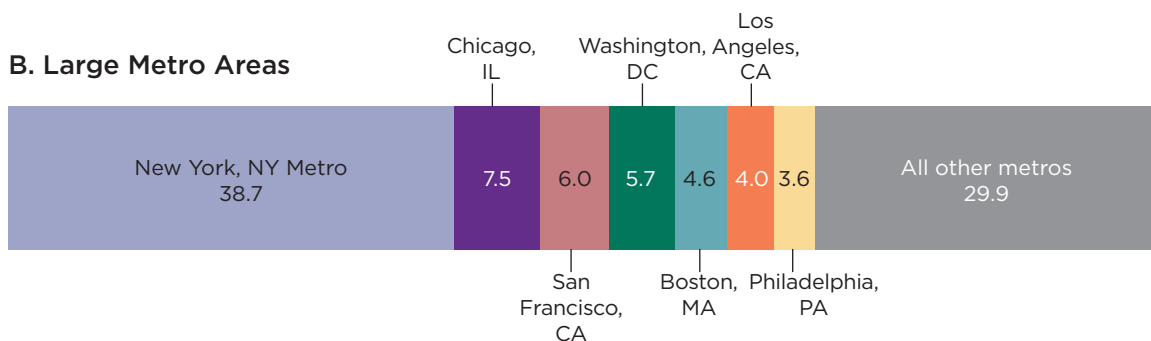
### Distribution of All Public Transportation Commuters Across Regions and Large Metro Areas: 2019

(A. Workers 16 years and over who commute by public transportation. B. Workers 16 years and over living in metro areas who commute by public transportation. Percent of all public transportation commuters)

#### A. Regions



#### B. Large Metro Areas



Notes: Each panel presents the total transit commuter population in that universe of workers and sums to 100. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see <[www.census.gov/acs](http://www.census.gov/acs)>. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey, 1-year estimates.



Table 3.

### Public Transportation Commuting Among 25 Large Metropolitan Areas and Their Largest Cities: 2019

(Workers 16 years and over who live in metro areas. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see <www.census.gov/acs>)

Metropolitan statistical area	Total metro area			Largest city within metro area		
	Total public transportation commuters	Percent of all workers	Margin of error (±)	Total public transportation commuters	Percent of all workers	Margin of error (±)
New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ-PA . . . . .	3,000,640	31.6	0.2	2,242,092	55.6	0.5
Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN-WI . . . . .	584,804	12.4	0.3	385,018	28.4	0.8
San Francisco-Oakland-Berkeley, CA . . . . .	461,832	18.9	0.4	191,018	36.3	1.4
Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV . . . . .	440,972	13.1	0.4	131,786	34.2	1.4
Boston-Cambridge-Newton, MA-NH . . . . .	353,924	13.4	0.4	128,238	32.0	1.5
Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA . . . . .	310,932	4.8	0.1	177,099	8.8	0.4
Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington, PA-NJ-DE-MD . . . . .	282,412	9.4	0.3	181,698	25.5	1.2
Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue, WA . . . . .	224,965	10.7	0.4	115,989	25.1	1.2
Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach, FL . . . . .	88,881	2.9	0.2	19,304	7.9	1.5
Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, MN-WI . . . . .	88,051	4.5	0.2	29,617	12.0	1.3
Portland-Vancouver-Hillsboro, OR-WA . . . . .	85,160	6.7	0.5	49,103	13.4	1.2
Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Alpharetta, GA . . . . .	83,142	2.8	0.2	25,969	10.0	1.4
Baltimore-Columbia-Towson, MD . . . . .	82,685	5.9	0.4	42,249	15.4	1.5
Denver-Aurora-Lakewood, CO . . . . .	73,229	4.5	0.3	31,868	7.6	0.9
Pittsburgh, PA . . . . .	69,104	6.0	0.4	27,458	17.3	1.8
Houston-The Woodlands-Sugar Land, TX . . . . .	65,870	2.0	0.2	42,471	3.8	0.4
Bridgeport-Stamford-Norwalk, CT . . . . .	49,354	10.5	0.8	7,406	11.6	2.9
Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX . . . . .	48,522	1.3	0.1	23,523	3.5	0.5
San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara, CA . . . . .	47,745	4.7	0.4	26,089	5.0	0.5
San Diego-Chula Vista-Carlsbad, CA . . . . .	47,478	2.8	0.3	29,069	3.9	0.5
Phoenix-Mesa-Chandler, AZ . . . . .	42,925	1.8	0.2	24,300	2.9	0.4
Urban Honolulu, HI . . . . .	35,375	7.2	0.8	20,019	11.0	1.4
Las Vegas-Henderson-Paradise, NV . . . . .	31,231	2.9	0.4	7,473	2.5	0.6
Cleveland-Elyria, OH . . . . .	29,006	2.9	0.3	13,070	8.2	0.9
Detroit-Warren-Dearborn, MI . . . . .	28,450	1.4	0.2	19,391	7.5	1.1
All other metro areas . . . . .	1,022,000	1.4	0.1	565,000	2.5	0.1

Note: Because cities are not always fully nested within metro areas, some portion of the largest cities may lie outside a metro area.  
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey, 1-year estimates.

by public transportation, as did 36.3 percent of workers within the city of San Francisco.

The South contributed 15.1 percent of all transit commuters. Many of these came from the Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV Metro Area, which was home to 5.7 percent of the nation's metro-based transit commuters. About 34 percent of workers living in Washington, DC, commuted by public transportation in 2019, compared to 13.1 percent of workers living in the broader Washington, DC, metro area.

The smallest regional group of public transportation commuters lived in the Midwest, even as the Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN-WI Metro Area contained the second-highest share of metro-based transit commuters, at 7.5 percent (Figure 6). With 12.4 percent of workers commuting by public transportation, over half a million transit commuters lived in the Chicago Metro Area in 2019 (Table 3).

The New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and Washington, DC, metros were joined by the Boston-Cambridge-Newton, MA-NH Metro Area,

the Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA Metro Area, and the Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington, PA-NJ-DE-MD Metro Area to make up a group of seven metro areas contributing the most public transportation commuters to the national estimate.

#### A CLOSER LOOK AT THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF COMMUTERS<sup>11</sup>

Women made up a disproportionate share of public

<sup>11</sup> See the Appendix Table for statistics for the population aged 16 and over and for all workers in the same geographic categories described in this section.

transportation commuters, especially in transit-heavy metros. Within the seven transit-heavy metro areas described above, 50.6 percent of transit commuters were women, compared to 46.9 percent among all other commuters. In the remainder of the United States, women made up a marginally larger share of transit commuters than those commuting by other modes (48.3 percent compared to 47.1 percent).

As presented above, the age composition of public transportation commuters in 2019 was generally younger than that of all other commuters. Within the seven transit-heavy metros, 18.0 percent of public transportation commuters in 2019 were aged 55 and over, compared to 24.1 percent of all other commuters. The difference between older workers across travel modes was similar in the remainder of the United States, with 18.5 percent of public transportation

commuters aged 55 and older, compared to 23.1 percent of all other commuters. Outside of the seven transit-heavy metros, younger workers made up a particularly large share of transit users in 2019. Workers aged 16 to 24 made up 18.8 percent of public transportation commuters, compared to 13.4 percent of all other commuters. In the seven transit-heavy metros, workers aged 16 to 24 made up 11.2 percent of transit commuters.

Table 4.

**Public Transportation Commuters and All Other Workers by Selected Population Characteristics: 2019**

(Workers 16 years and over. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see <[www.census.gov/acs](http://www.census.gov/acs)>)

Characteristic	Seven transit-heavy metro areas				Remainder of United States			
	Public transportation commuters		All other workers		Public transportation commuters		All other workers	
	Percent	Margin of error (±)	Percent	Margin of error (±)	Percent	Margin of error (±)	Percent	Margin of error (±)
<b>Sex</b>								
Male .....	49.4	0.3	53.1	0.1	51.7	0.6	52.9	0.1
Female .....	50.6	0.3	46.9	0.1	48.3	0.6	47.1	0.1
<b>Age</b>								
16 to 24 .....	11.2	0.2	10.8	0.1	18.8	0.5	13.4	0.1
25 to 34 .....	30.8	0.4	22.6	0.1	26.7	0.6	22.4	0.1
35 to 44 .....	22.1	0.3	21.3	0.1	19.2	0.4	21.0	0.1
45 to 54 .....	17.9	0.3	21.2	0.1	16.8	0.5	20.1	0.1
55 and over .....	18.0	0.3	24.1	0.1	18.5	0.5	23.1	0.1
<b>Race and Hispanic or Latino origin</b>								
One race .....	96.4	0.2	97.2	0.1	96.0	0.3	97.5	0.1
White .....	48.0	0.4	63.1	0.1	53.2	0.7	77.0	0.1
Black or African American .....	21.7	0.3	11.9	0.1	26.4	0.6	11.3	0.1
American Indian and Alaska Native ...	0.4	0.1	0.4	0.1	1.3	0.2	0.8	0.1
Asian .....	14.8	0.3	12.1	0.1	9.8	0.4	4.4	0.1
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander .....	0.1	0.0	0.2	0.1	0.5	0.1	0.2	0.1
Some other race .....	11.4	0.4	9.6	0.1	4.8	0.3	3.7	0.1
Two or more races .....	3.6	0.2	2.8	0.1	4.0	0.3	2.5	0.1
Hispanic or Latino origin, of any race. ...	24.9	0.4	24.0	0.1	16.8	0.5	16.1	0.1
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino .....	37.6	0.4	50.2	0.1	42.6	0.6	65.6	0.1
<b>Earnings</b>								
\$0 to \$24,999 .....	25.0	0.3	25.9	0.2	44.4	0.7	31.3	0.1
\$25,000 to \$49,999 .....	23.8	0.3	25.8	0.1	25.2	0.6	31.2	0.1
\$50,000 to \$74,999 .....	16.8	0.3	17.9	0.1	11.9	0.4	18.1	0.1
\$75,000 to \$99,999 .....	10.8	0.2	10.6	0.1	6.4	0.3	8.2	0.1
\$100,000 or more .....	23.5	0.3	19.7	0.1	12.1	0.3	11.1	0.1

Notes: The seven transit-heavy metro areas considered in this analysis are the Boston-Cambridge-Newton, MA-NH Metro Area; the Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN-WI Metro Area; the Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA Metro Area; the New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ-PA Metro Area; the Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington, PA-NJ-DE-MD Metro Area; the San Francisco-Oakland-Berkeley, CA Metro Area; and the Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV Metro Area.

See the Appendix Table for statistics for the population aged 16 and over and for all workers in the same geographic categories.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey, 1-year estimates.



The racial composition of public transportation commuters differed from that of all other commuters, with White workers less prominent on transit.<sup>12</sup> Within the seven transit-heavy metro areas, 48.0 percent of transit commuters were White and 21.7 percent were Black or African American. Among workers not commuting by public transportation, 63.1 percent were White, and 11.9 percent were Black or African American. In the remainder of the United States, 53.2 percent of public transportation commuters were White, and 26.4 percent were Black or African American. In comparison, 77.0 percent of all other commuters were White, and 11.3 percent were Black or African American. Asian workers, workers reporting Some Other Race or Two or More Races, and workers of Hispanic or Latino origin (of any race) also made up a larger share of public transportation commuters than of all other commuters, both in the seven transit-heavy metro areas and in the remainder of the United States.

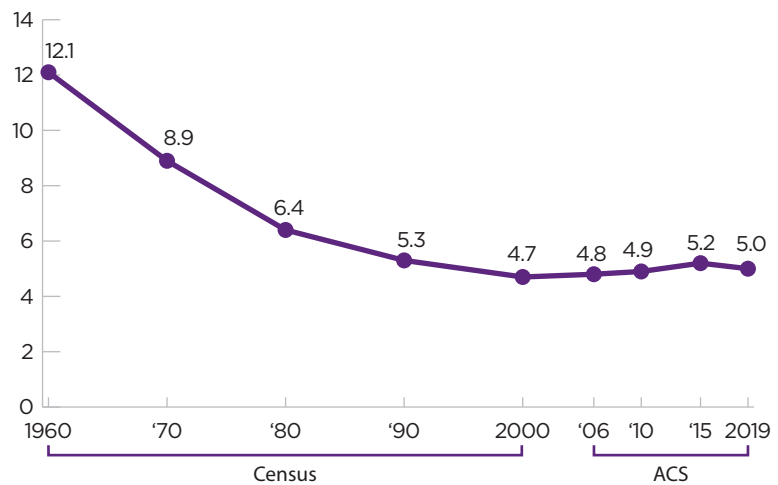
The earnings composition of public transportation commuters closely resembled that of all other commuters in transit-heavy metro areas. For example, in the seven transit-heavy metro areas, a marginally lower share of public transportation

<sup>12</sup> Individuals who responded to the question on race by indicating only one race are referred to by that race alone. "Some Other Race" refers to individuals who did not identify with any of the five race categories, and "Two or More Races" denotes the population that identified with more than one race. Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race. The use of these categories and terminology does not imply that this is the preferred method of presenting or analyzing data. The Census Bureau uses a variety of approaches.

Figure 7.

**Percent of Workers Commuting by Public Transportation in the United States: 1960–2019**

(Workers 16 years and over)



Note: For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see <[www.census.gov/acs](http://www.census.gov/acs)>. Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990, and 2000 estimates; 2006, 2010, 2015, and 2019 American Community Survey, 1-year estimates.

commuters (25.0 percent) than all other commuters (25.9 percent) earned less than \$25,000 annually. Elsewhere, transit commuters tended to earn less than other workers. Outside of the seven transit-heavy metros, 44.4 percent of public transportation commuters earned less than \$25,000 annually, compared to 31.3 percent of all other commuters.<sup>13</sup>

**HISTORICAL TRENDS**

When the Census Bureau first collected information about work travel in the 1960 Census, 12.1 percent of workers reported traveling by public transportation (Figure 7). Over the next decade, this figure would decline to 8.9 percent, to 6.4

<sup>13</sup> Outside of the seven transit-heavy metros, a slightly higher share of transit commuters (12.1 percent) compared to all other commuters (11.1 percent) earned \$100,000 or more annually.

percent in 1980, and to 5.3 percent in 1990. The 2000 Census reported a historical low of 4.7 percent of workers commuting by public transportation. Since then, the share of workers commuting by public transportation has hovered around 5 percent.

**CONCLUSION**

Almost 8 million people in the United States routinely used public transportation to get to work in 2019. Though this group was just a small share of all U.S. workers, public transportation played a particularly important role within a few key metros and cities—especially cities like New York, where over half of all workers used public transportation to get to work, and the Chicago metro area, where over 500,000 people commuted by transit. Even where public transportation was not as prominent,

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small shares of workers throughout the United States traveled to work using buses, van services, and other available public transportation options. Public transportation disproportionately served women, young people, Black or African American people, and where transit was less prominent, the lowest-earning workers.

The geographic and demographic patterns associated with public transportation demonstrate the importance of multiple transportation options for U.S. workers. The ACS will continue to collect data that shed light on the commuting experiences of workers in the United States and help to characterize the workers who rely on public transportation to get to work.

## **SOURCE AND ACCURACY OF THE ESTIMATES**

The data presented in this report are based on the ACS sample interviewed from January 1, 2019, through December 31, 2019. The estimates based on this sample describe the actual average values of person, household, and housing unit characteristics over this period of collection. Sampling error is the uncertainty between an estimate based on a sample and the corresponding value that would be obtained if the estimate were based on the entire population (as from a census). Measures of sampling error are provided in the form of margins of error for all estimates included in this report. All comparative statements in this report have undergone statistical testing and comparisons are significant at the 90 percent confidence level. In addition to sampling error, nonsampling

error may be introduced during any of the operations used to collect and process survey data such as editing, reviewing, or keying data from questionnaires. For more information on sampling and estimation methods, confidentiality protection, and sampling and nonsampling errors, see the 2019 ACS 1-year Accuracy of the Data (US) document located at [www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/technical-documentation/code-lists.html](http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/technical-documentation/code-lists.html).

## **SUGGESTED CITATION**

Burrows, Michael, Charlynn Burd, and Brian McKenzie, "Commuting by Public Transportation in the United States: 2019" *American Community Survey Reports*, ACS-48, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 2021.

Appendix Table.

**Population Aged 16 and Over and All Workers in the United States by Selected Population Characteristics: 2019**

(People 16 years and over. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see <www.census.gov/acs>)

Characteristic	Seven transit-heavy metro areas				Remainder of United States			
	Population aged 16 and over		All workers		Population aged 16 and over		All workers	
	Percent	Margin of error (±)	Percent	Margin of error (±)	Percent	Margin of error (±)	Percent	Margin of error (±)
<b>Sex</b>								
Male .....	48.3	0.1	52.5	0.1	48.9	0.1	52.8	0.1
Female .....	51.7	0.1	47.5	0.1	51.1	0.1	47.2	0.1
<b>Age</b>								
16 to 24 .....	13.8	0.1	10.8	0.1	14.9	0.1	13.5	0.1
25 to 34 .....	18.6	0.1	24.0	0.1	17.0	0.1	22.4	0.1
35 to 44 .....	16.5	0.1	21.5	0.1	15.8	0.1	21.0	0.1
45 to 54 .....	16.2	0.1	20.7	0.1	15.3	0.1	20.0	0.1
55 and over .....	34.9	0.1	23.0	0.1	37.1	0.1	23.0	0.1
<b>Race and Hispanic or Latino origin</b>								
One race .....	97.2	0.1	97.0	0.1	97.5	0.1	97.4	0.1
White .....	59.9	0.1	60.6	0.1	76.7	0.1	76.6	0.1
Black or African American .....	14.6	0.1	13.5	0.1	12.0	0.1	11.6	0.1
American Indian and Alaska Native .....	0.4	0.1	0.4	0.1	0.9	0.1	0.8	0.1
Asian .....	12.6	0.1	12.5	0.1	4.3	0.1	4.5	0.1
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander .....	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.1
Some other race .....	9.5	0.1	9.9	0.1	3.4	0.1	3.7	0.1
Two or more races .....	2.8	0.1	3.0	0.1	2.5	0.1	2.6	0.1
Hispanic or Latino origin, of any race .....	23.3	0.1	24.1	0.1	15.0	0.1	16.1	0.1
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino .....	47.8	0.1	48.1	0.1	66.0	0.1	65.1	0.1
<b>Earnings</b>								
\$0 to \$24,999 .....	X	X	25.8	0.1	X	X	31.6	0.1
\$25,000 to \$49,999 .....	X	X	25.5	0.1	X	X	31.1	0.1
\$50,000 to \$74,999 .....	X	X	17.7	0.1	X	X	18.0	0.1
\$75,000 to \$99,999 .....	X	X	10.6	0.1	X	X	8.2	0.1
\$100,000 or more .....	X	X	20.3	0.1	X	X	11.1	0.1

X Not applicable.

Note: The seven transit-heavy metro areas considered in this analysis are the Boston-Cambridge-Newton, MA-NH Metro Area; the Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN-WI Metro Area; the Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA Metro Area; the New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ-PA Metro Area; the Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington, PA-NJ-DE-MD Metro Area; the San Francisco-Oakland-Berkeley, CA Metro Area; and the Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV Metro Area.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey, 1-year estimates.