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# WHO NEEDS TRANSIT?

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*All Neighborhoods Home to Transit-Dependent Nashvillians*



*PRAGMATIC IDEAS TO MOVE TENNESSEE FORWARD*

# **INTRODUCTION**

With the 2017 passage of the IMPROVE Act, many Tennessee cities are now able to choose a new local option to fund public transit. As communities across the state look to decide their own transit futures, they may ask themselves...

## **Who needs public transit?**

According to a 2016 report from the Tennessee Department of Transportation,<sup>1</sup> a wide range of Tennesseans stand to benefit from improved transportation infrastructure. Its list of potentially transit-dependent users includes **senior citizens, people with a disability** and those **without vehicle access**, among others. It also notes that **families with children** often must make more daily trips than families without children. For single parents, these trips can be particularly challenging.

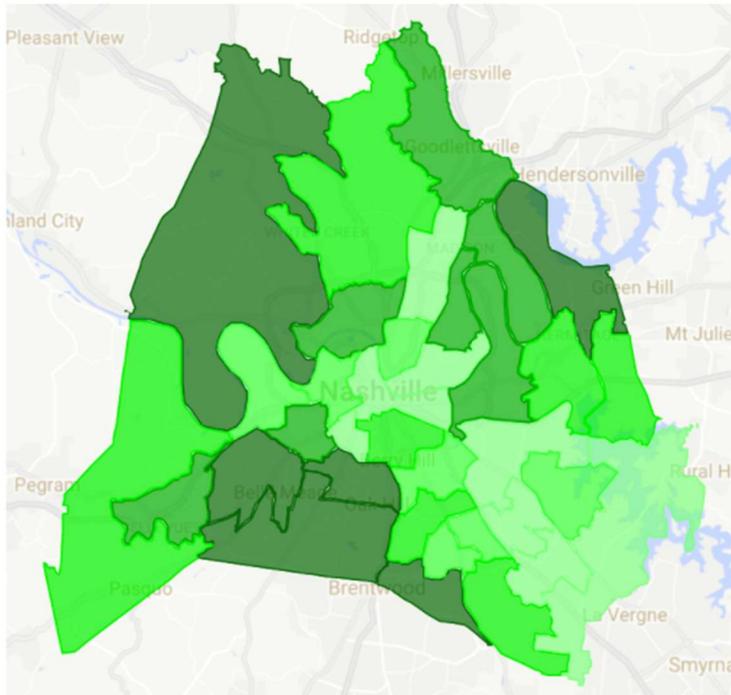
As the first Tennessee city to consider exercising the local option, Nashville is poised to make a choice that will affect transit-dependent populations within its borders for decades to come.

An analysis of U.S. Census data and quality-of-life information reveals two important conclusions:

- (1) High rates of potentially transit-dependent residents are interspersed throughout Nashville; and**
- (2) Improved transit access benefits these residents in a wide variety of ways.**

# SENIOR CITIZENS

Across Davidson County, seniors aged 65+ comprise **almost 11% of the population**—or more than 71,000 residents.<sup>2</sup> In some council districts, they account for as much as **20% of residents**.<sup>3</sup>



RATE OF SENIOR CITIZENS IN DAVIDSON COUNTY, BY COUNCIL DISTRICT

## Percent

- 4.4–6.9
- 7.0–9.8
- 10.3–12.3
- 12.7–15.6
- 16.0–20.1

Yet, as compared with similarly sized areas, seniors in the Nashville metropolitan area experience the **fourth lowest transit access in the nation**: A whopping 85% of Nashville-area seniors have poor transit access.<sup>4</sup>

Nationally, more than one in five seniors do not drive; more than half of these non-drivers stay home on any

given day because they lack transportation options.<sup>5</sup> This restricted mobility often translates into more limited opportunities for physical, mental and social wellbeing. Indeed, seniors without transportation options make **15% fewer doctor's visits, 59% fewer shopping trips and restaurant visits and 65% fewer trips for social, family and religious activities**.<sup>6</sup>

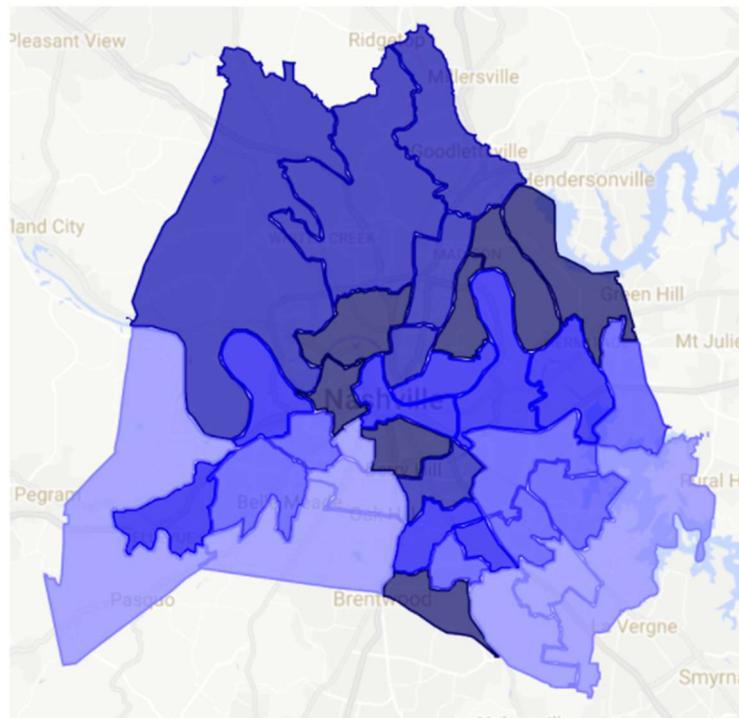
Four in five seniors believe public transportation is a better alternative to driving alone, especially at night.<sup>7</sup> And 83% of seniors agree that public transit provides easy access to the things that older adults need in everyday life.<sup>8</sup>

Tennessee's population as a whole is growing steadily older, potentially exacerbating issues related to lack of transit access. By 2040, **Tennessee's 65+ population is projected to nearly double**, resulting in almost 800,000 more seniors across the state.<sup>9</sup>

# RESIDENTS WITH A DISABILITY

**More than 76,000 Nashville residents**—11.6%—have a disability.<sup>10</sup> In some council districts, this rate rises to **one in five**.<sup>11</sup>

Many individuals with disabilities rely on family members or others in their household for help getting where they need to go. More than **57,000 households**—22%—in Nashville are home to a person with a disability.<sup>12</sup>



RATE OF PERSONS WITH A DISABILITY IN DAVIDSON COUNTY, BY COUNCIL DISTRICT

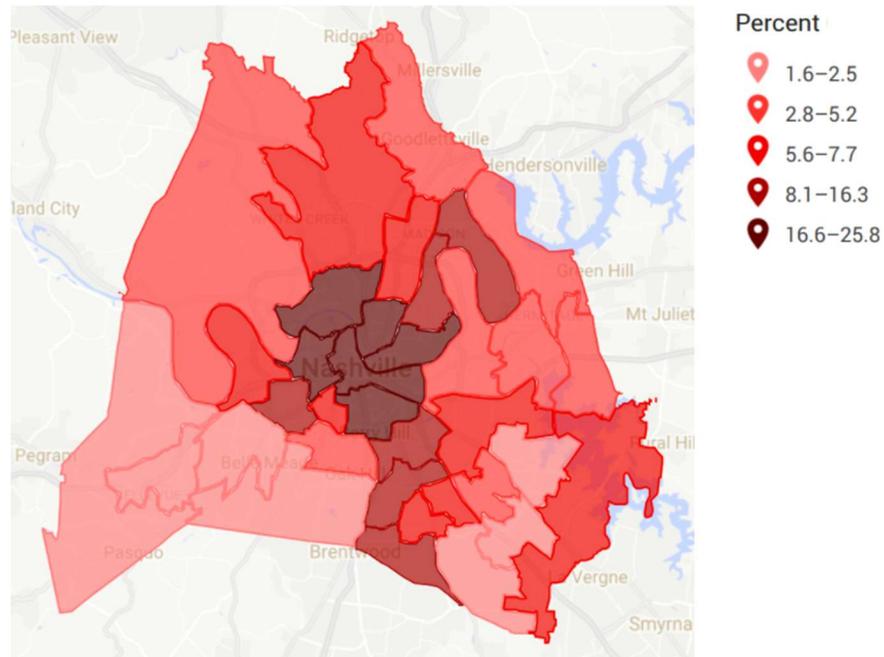
Lack of transportation access is more prevalent among individuals with disabilities—and more likely to leave them stuck at home. Nationally, **roughly one third (34%)** of adults with disabilities report that they have difficulties obtaining the transportation they need—a rate more than twice as high as for those without a disability (16%).<sup>13</sup>

Of the nearly 3.5 million Americans who never leave their homes, more than half (1.9 million) are people with disabilities. More than a quarter of those (560,000) cited transportation difficulties as a key contributor to being homebound.<sup>14</sup>

# RESIDENTS WITHOUT VEHICLE ACCESS

In some parts of Nashville, particularly the urban core, more than **one in four** residents lacks regular vehicle access.<sup>15</sup> Citywide, nearly 3,100 households have no vehicle available.<sup>16</sup>

For residents without regular access to a vehicle, affordable and reliable transit options are critical. Absenteeism, sometimes due to the lack of a way to get to work, is one of the most common reasons the working poor are fired.<sup>17</sup>



RATE OF RESIDENTS WITHOUT VEHICLE ACCESS IN DAVIDSON COUNTY, BY COUNCIL DISTRICT

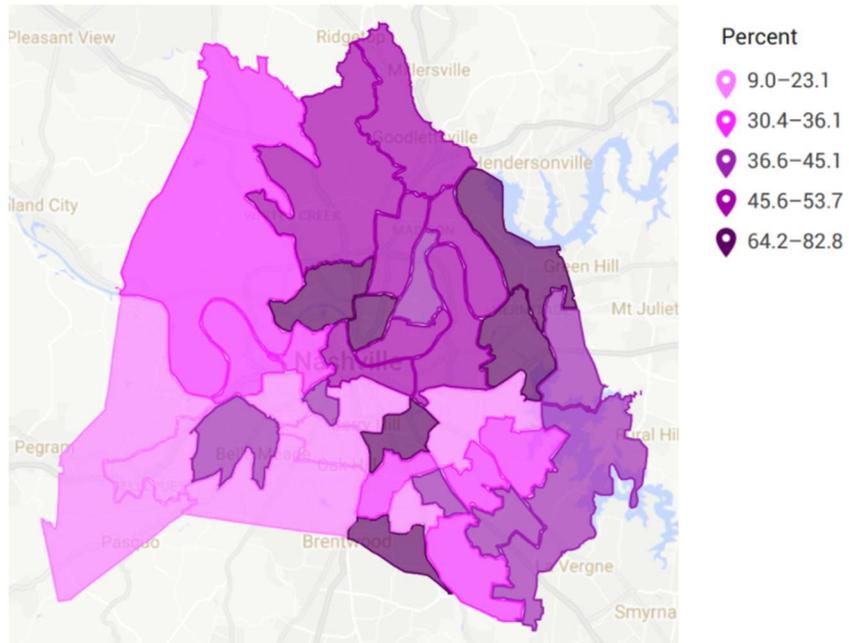
Transportation costs eat up the household budgets of the working poor: Americans in the lowest 20% income bracket spend **roughly 42% of their annual income** on transportation, compared to 22% for middle-income Americans.<sup>18</sup>

# SINGLE PARENTS

Of Nashville’s 65,264 families with children, **almost 26,000** (39.5%) are headed by a single parent.<sup>19</sup> That rate rises to **nearly 83%** in parts of the city.<sup>20</sup>

For single parents, transit options might help ease the burden of getting children to afterschool activities—or to school itself. Those options in turn reduce the burden of certain employment issues, such as inflexible schedules, which can make it difficult for single parents who are responsible for transporting children during work hours.<sup>21</sup>

Nationally, more than one in three families headed by a single mother lives in poverty.<sup>22</sup> Commute time is **the single strongest factor** in the odds of escaping poverty: The longer the average commute in a county, the worse the chances of a low-income family there moving up the income ladder.<sup>23</sup>



RATE OF SINGLE PARENTS AS A PERCENTAGE OF FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN IN DAVIDSON COUNTY, BY COUNCIL DISTRICT

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- <sup>1</sup> Tennessee Department of Transportation, *TDOT 25-Year Long-Range Transportation Policy Plan: Demographic and Employment Changes and Trends* (2016), available at [https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/tdot/documents/Demographic\\_022316.pdf](https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/tdot/documents/Demographic_022316.pdf).
- <sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates* (2015).
- <sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates* (2015).
- <sup>4</sup> Transportation for America, *Aging in Place, Stuck Without Options* (2011), available at <http://t4america.org/docs/SeniorsMobilityCrisis.pdf> (ranking transit access for seniors age 65-79 for 2015 among metropolitan areas of 1-3 million people).
- <sup>5</sup> AARP, *The Benefits of Public Transportation: Expanding the Transportation Options in an Aging Society* (2013), available at <https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/learn/transportation-mobility/info-2013/benefits-of-public-transportation-aarp.html>; Transportation for America, *Waiting for a Ride: Transit Access and America's Aging Population*, available at <https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/livable-communities/learn/transportation/waiting-for-a-ride-transit-access-and-americas-aging-population-aarp.pdf>.
- <sup>6</sup> AARP, *The Benefits of Public Transportation: Expanding the Transportation Options in an Aging Society*.
- <sup>7</sup> American Public Transportation Association, *Public Transportation: Benefits for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (2007), available at [http://www.apta.com/resources/reportsandpublications/Documents/twenty\\_first\\_century.pdf](http://www.apta.com/resources/reportsandpublications/Documents/twenty_first_century.pdf).
- <sup>8</sup> American Public Transportation Association, *Public Transportation: Benefits for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*.
- <sup>9</sup> Tennessee Department of Transportation, *TDOT 25-Year Long-Range Transportation Policy Plan: Demographic and Employment Changes and Trends*.
- <sup>10</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates* (2015).
- <sup>11</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates* (2015).
- <sup>12</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates* (2015).
- <sup>13</sup> National Council on Disability, *Supporting Parents With Disabilities and Their Families in the Community* (2012), available at <https://www.ncd.gov/publications/2012/Sep272012/Ch13>.
- <sup>14</sup> AARP Public Policy Institute, *Opportunities for Creating Livable Communities* (2008), available at [https://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/il/2008\\_02\\_communities.pdf](https://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/il/2008_02_communities.pdf).
- <sup>15</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates* (2015).
- <sup>16</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates* (2015).
- <sup>17</sup> United Way, *When Low-Wage Workers' Problems Become a Company's Problem* (2015), available at <https://www.unitedway.org/the-latest/in-the-news/when-low-wage-workers-problems-become-a-companys-problem>.
- <sup>18</sup> The Leadership Conference Education Fund, *Where We Need to Go: A Civil Rights Roadmap for Transportation Equity* (2011), available at <http://www.protectcivilrights.org/pdf/docs/transportation/52846576-Where-We-Need-to-Go-A-Civil-Rights-Roadmap-for-Transportation-Equity.pdf>.
- <sup>19</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates* (2015).
- <sup>20</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates* (2015).
- <sup>21</sup> Urban Institute, *Driving to Opportunity: Understanding the Links Among Transportation Access, Residential Outcomes and Economic Opportunity for Housing Voucher Recipients* (2014), available at <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/22461/413078-Driving-to-Opportunity-Understanding-the-Links-among-Transportation-Access-Residential-Outcomes-and-Economic-Opportunity-for-Housing-Voucher-Recipients.PDF>.
- <sup>22</sup> National Women's Law Center, *National Snapshot: Poverty Among Women and Families* (2015), available at <https://nwlc.org/resources/national-snapshot-poverty-among-women-families-2015/>.
- <sup>23</sup> National Bureau of Economic Research, *Where is the Land of Opportunity? The Geography of Intergenerational Mobility in the United States* (2014), available at <http://www.nber.org/papers/w19843.pdf>; see also Mikayla Bouchard, *The New York Times*, *Transportation Emerges as Crucial to Escaping Poverty* (2015), available at [https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/07/upshot/transportation-emerges-as-crucial-to-escaping-poverty.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/07/upshot/transportation-emerges-as-crucial-to-escaping-poverty.html?_r=0).