

RESEARCH BRIEF

Public Transit Helps Essential Hospital Workers Get to Work | April 2020



PURPOSE

Service, clerical, and technical hospital workers,* like many people, use public transportation to commute to work every day. Without public transportation, many workers would not be able to find affordable means to get to work. This brief examines the use of public transportation among hospital workers in order to better understand the importance of public transportation for workers. In particular, it examines the overall use of public transportation and how that differs by race, hourly wage, and household income. Further, it examines the relationship between public transportation use and housing, financial, medical and food hardships.

METHOD

Data come from second wave of a three-wave longitudinal survey of hospital workers in Western Pennsylvania ($N=330$). The hospital workers are part of a union that organized at a local hospital and negotiated a contract that will eventually bring all starting salaries up to at least \$15 an hour. A structured online survey included questions on wages/income, hardships, and family and individual demographics. Bivariate analyses were conducted to examine the difference in the use of public transportation by race, hourly wage, and household income, and the relationship between public transportation use and multiple types of material hardship.

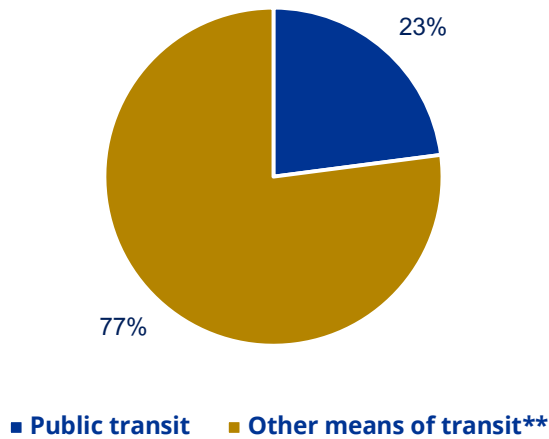
KEY FINDINGS

- Over a fifth (23%) of hospital workers rely on public transportation to get to work.
- African American hospital workers (43%) are more likely to use public transportation than White workers (10%).
- Hospital workers who take public transportation earn less than hospital workers who do not take public transportation.
- Hospital workers who take public transportation experience more hardships than workers who do not.

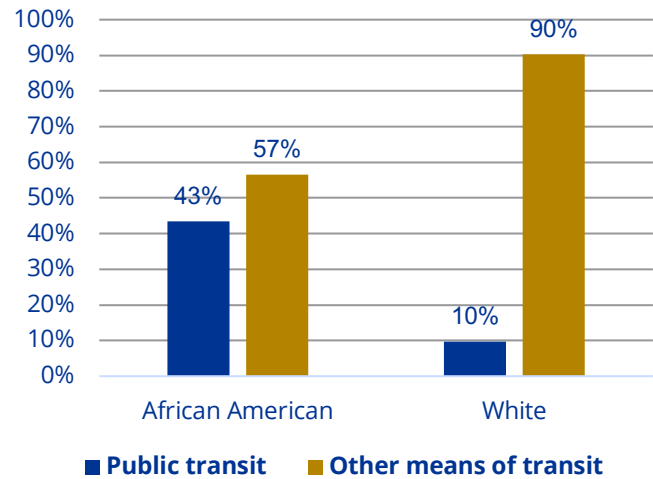
* In the remainder of this brief, we use "hospital workers" to include service, clerical, and technical hospital workers.

DEMOGRAPHICS

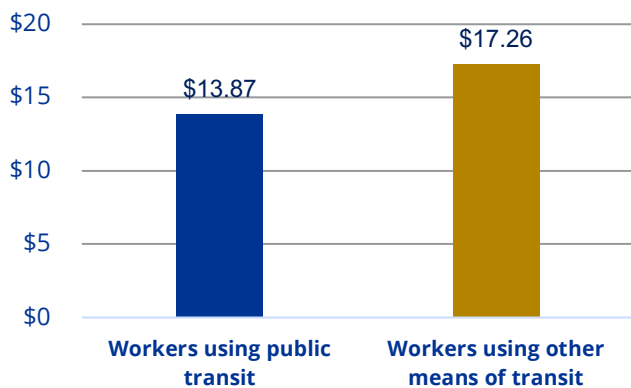
Primary Mode of Transit



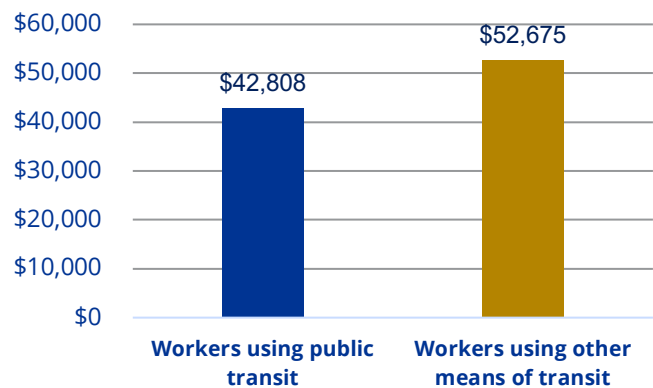
Race/Ethnicity



Average Hourly Wage



Yearly Household Income



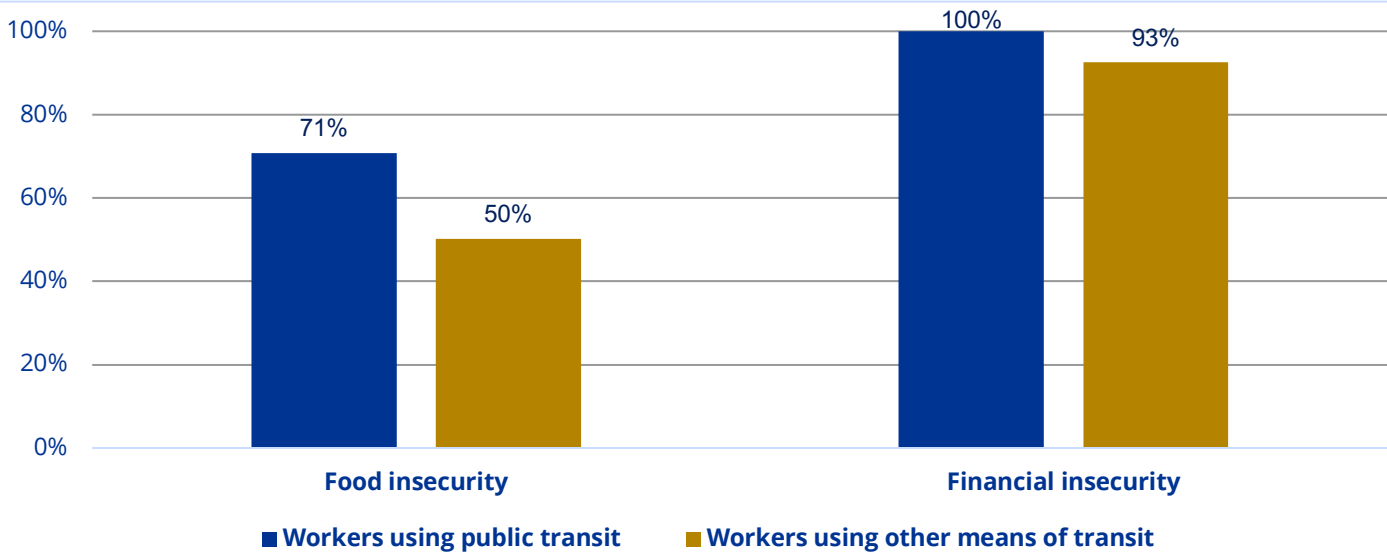
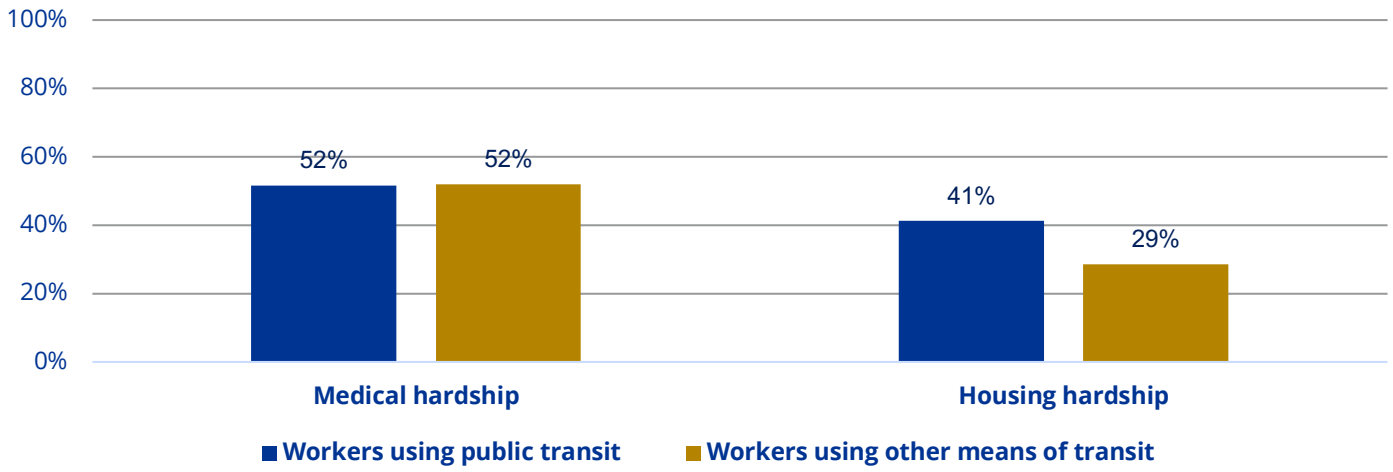
FINDINGS

Twenty three percent of hospital workers report using public transportation as their primary form of transportation from home to work. More than four in 10 African American workers use public transportation compared to only one in 10 White workers. Hospital workers who use public transportation make a significantly lower hourly wage and report a significantly lower household income as compared to workers who do not use public transportation.

** Other means of transit in this brief include driving own car, riding with someone, biking or walking, and using a car service.

MATERIAL HARDSHIP

Workers Taking Public Transportation Face More Hardships.



FINDINGS

Hospital workers who report taking public transportation as their primary form of transportation to work also report experiencing substantially more housing hardships and higher levels of food insecurity. They also report more overall financial hardships than workers who do not take public transportation.

CONCLUSION

A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF HOSPITAL WORKERS DEPEND ON PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Many hospital workers rely on public transportation to get to work every day. These workers are more likely to be African American and earn less than their colleagues who do not take public transportation. They are also more likely to experience other hardships, making it apparent that their budgets are already strained and thus finding other ways to get to work would be difficult. Therefore, any changes in access to public transportation may affect workers facing material hardships disproportionately.

THE WORK THAT HOSPITAL WORKERS DO IS ESSENTIAL

As we have reported elsewhere (<http://www.pittsburghwagestudy.pitt.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/essential-hospital-work-Final.pdf>), hospital service workers are essential to maintaining safe and caring hospitals to support healthy communities. Whether sterilizing equipment, maintaining a sanitary environment, or preparing and delivering food, the work they do is essential. Therefore, making sure hospital workers can get to work is vital. By supporting public transit, we support hospital workers and allow them to do their essential work to support a safe and healthy community.

WE MUST ENSURE THAT HOSPITAL WORKERS HAVE ACCESS TO SAFE, AFFORDABLE, AND CONSISTENT PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Public transportation is vital to the well-being of Pittsburgh. It enables workers like hospital workers to get to their jobs, many of which are indispensable to the health and well-being of the city. It is also connected to other aspects of well-being, such as food security and housing stability. Federal and state investment is needed to expand access and maintain affordability.

The importance of federal and state investment is especially relevant as the city, region, nation, and world deal with the Coronavirus pandemic. Decreased usage has reduced the fare revenue on which systems depend. Safety measures being instituted further cost money and reduce revenue. These measures are essential to promote the health and safety of transit employees and passengers. Public investment must ensure that the public transportation system can keep running and maintain these necessary safety measures.

About the Author: This brief was authored by Jihee Woo, Jeffrey Shook, Kess Ballentine, Soobin Kim, Sara Goodkind, Rafael Engel, Helen Petracchi, and Sandy Wexler. The authors are members of the Pittsburgh Wage Study Research Team. For questions please contact the Pittsburgh Wage Study at pittsburghwagestudy@pitt.edu.