

**ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT FOR ADULTS IN POVERTY
IN THE BUFFALO-NIAGARA REGION**

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ABSTRACT

This study builds upon the spatial mismatch literature by examining access to employment for the low-income population in Erie and Niagara Counties in western New York State; the two counties constitute a metropolitan area with varied urban structure. The analysis uses geographic information systems (GIS) to map residence and employment locations and calculate measures of employment and transportation access. Findings reveal that there are 1.42 low wage jobs per adult in poverty in the City of Buffalo and 0.74 low-wage jobs per adult in poverty in the suburbs. Throughout the two-county region, two-thirds of adults in poverty live within close proximity to a reasonable number of low-wage jobs. The ratio of the number of jobs accessible within a 30-minute commute by automobile versus public transit varies only slightly across neighborhoods. Poverty is highly centralized in the cities of Buffalo and Niagara Falls, and the analysis suggests that, based on the spatial distribution of low-wage employment and concentrations of poverty, central city locations had significant advantages in terms of proximity to jobs. The greatest degree of access to low-wage employment occurs in centrally located neighborhoods. The close proximity of the suburbs to the central city and the network of grid and radial streets connecting the two places make suburban job access reasonable. However, black/African American adults in poverty have poorer access to automobiles than whites, and as a result they may be able to search for jobs only within a smaller area. The study recommends (1) enhancements to public transit in places with large concentrations of low-wage jobs and (2) increased access to reliable automobiles in places with small concentrations of low-wage jobs.

Do these trends mirror national trends are is Buffalo operating differently?

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INTRODUCTION

In 1996, U.S. Congress put in place the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, also known as the welfare reform act, which replaced the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) with the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant program. This new law, designed to radically change the federal assistance policies for eligible families by ending lengthy benefit periods, created a system of time-limited benefits and work requirements. As a result, many unemployed individuals whose benefits expired urgently began seeking employment.

For those moving out of poverty and welfare and into the labor force, finding and maintaining work poses many challenges. Even prior to welfare reform, planners, local governments, and social service organizations already understood that the transportation barriers faced by low-income workers and potential workers prevented many from finding and keeping jobs in the low-wage labor market. Thus, one of the key challenges of securing employment is finding adequate transportation for both searching for work and sustaining a commute to a job once one is found.

Further complicating the physical separation between home and work is the notion of a ‘spatial mismatch’, a hypothesis which was first advanced by John Kain (1968, 1992) and which asserts that employment access for low-income people has been adversely affected by the shift of jobs from cities to suburbs. Kain argued that residential segregation kept low income families in distressed inner-city neighborhoods where, owing to lower automobile ownership rates, they were less capable of reaching job opportunities in the suburbs and were therefore more likely to be unemployed. As a result, poor and minority households usually devote a larger percentage of their income to transportation-related expenses; the journey-to-work for low-income individuals is further challenged by low automobile ownership rates and often deteriorating public transportation systems.

BACKGROUND

Over the years, the spatial mismatch has received a great deal of attention in academic literature. More recently, the underlying premise of the spatial mismatch hypothesis has been used in the study of welfare-to-work transportation. To assess whether low-wage workers face a “spatial mismatch,” a number of studies have examined the geographic location of low-income workers in relation to low-wage jobs, social and employment services, and public transit. Overall, these studies do indeed find that many low-wage workers face a spatial mismatch, although not necessarily a mismatch between central city and suburb as was originally described by Kain. In general, most cities have at least some inner-city neighborhoods where unemployment rates are high and jobs are few; often, low-wage workers live far from employment opportunities, even if these employment opportunities are located in the central city. The research suggests that the spatial mismatch is more prevalent in metropolitan areas with high levels of residential segregation and inadequate transportation services for reverse commuters, and less relevant in smaller, more centralized metropolitan areas (22).

In a number of studies, researchers have performed socio-spatial analyses to graphically depict the location of low-wage workers, low-wage jobs, and, frequently, the public-transit service linking the two. The findings of previous studies summarized in Table 1 highlight the diversity in the degree and type of spatial mismatch found within and among U.S. metropolitan areas.

[TABLE 1]

In some areas, such as Detroit, welfare recipients experience a distinct central city-suburban mismatch. In other metropolitan areas such as Los Angeles and Philadelphia, welfare recipients experience more localized or neighborhood-level mismatches. In either case, the studies show that at least some welfare recipients in every metropolitan area are spatially isolated from employment and have poor access to fixed-route transit. Beyond this general conclusion, it is difficult to compare and contrast these studies since they rely on varying data sources and methodologies, were conducted at different points in time, and included welfare recipients participating in various state welfare programs.

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH

Despite the growing number of studies on this topic, relatively little research has systematically compared and contrasted low-wage workers' access to jobs and public transit across areas with highly differentiated urban structures. An important study of welfare recipients' access to jobs and transportation was conducted in three diverse California counties—Alameda, Fresno, and Los Angeles (Blumenberg and Hess 2003). The study revealed that the majority of welfare recipients live in job-rich areas. However, there remain neighborhoods in all three counties in which welfare recipients are spatially isolated from jobs and, if employed, must sustain long commutes to distant locations. Job-poor neighborhoods are not an inner-city phenomenon only; they are also part of older, inner-ring suburbs as well as nonurbanized areas (Blumenberg and Hess 2003).

Therefore, to extend the research of the California study and explore the relationship between urban structure and job access in a different metropolitan setting, this study examines the nature of access and mobility challenges for the low-income population in Erie and Niagara Counties, two adjacent counties in western New York State that together constitute the Buffalo – Niagara Falls metropolitan area. The hypothesis is that low-wage employment access varies considerably both within counties (because of neighborhood characteristics) and between counties. While there are many similarities between Erie and Niagara counties, there are also significant differences. Erie County has a strong central core (with a wide variety of urban and suburban neighborhoods) while Niagara County has a smaller core and more rural areas.

The Study Area

The Buffalo-Niagara Falls metropolitan statistical area, shown in Figure 1, is comprised of Erie County (population 950,300) and Niagara County (population 219,800), which borders Erie County to the north (U.S. Bureau of Census 2000).

[FIGURE 1]

The largest city in Erie County, Buffalo is a prototypical medium-sized “ring” city of the Great Lakes region with a central core surrounded by inner-ring suburbs followed by outer-ring suburbs. Population density is high in the central city, but, owing to dispersion and declining population, not nearly as high as it was in the middle part of the 20th century. Distances between suburbs and the central city are, for the most part, relatively short – the average travel time to work for residents of both the city and suburbs is 21 minutes, one of the shortest average commutes among medium- and large-sized metropolitan areas (U.S. Bureau of Census 2000). Both city and suburbs are well-served by a network of grid and radial streets, highways and expressways, and transit routes.

Like many aging cities, Buffalo has experienced suburban sprawl and a shift of jobs and residences outside of the central city. Nevertheless, the cities of Buffalo and Niagara Falls have a large transit-dependent population who need access to employment, now located largely in the suburbs, in the retail,

service, and health care fields. Significant job opportunities in these fields are available in suburbs throughout Erie and Niagara counties, although public transit has historically underserved these markets. Traditional fixed-route transit service provided by the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA) is, for the most part, oriented toward commuting to the city center; low population densities in the suburbs make frequent transit service there impractical.

Since the 1950s, the region's population has exhibited decline and abandonment in the central cities and slow growth in surrounding areas. The population of the City of Buffalo declined 50 percent between 1950 and 2000, while the population of Erie County increased 6 percent during the same 50-year period, although the county reached a peak population in 1970 that exceeds today's population (U.S. Census Bureau 2000). During the second half of the 20th century, the region's dwindling population left the city and inner-ring suburbs and sprawled outward to suburban town such as Lancaster, Clarence, Orchard Park, and beyond (Cervantes 2000).

Similar trends continue today. Population in the City of Buffalo fell by 11 percent between 1990 and 2000, while it increased 3 percent in the suburbs. In a region that is not experiencing growth (the metropolitan area lost about 2 percent of its population during the decade) suburban growth comes at the expense of prosperity in the urban core. In neighboring Niagara County, city and suburban growth and decline is similar. Population in the City of Niagara Falls fell by 10 percent during the last decade while it also increased 3 percent in the suburbs. *You might also indicate that the black and Latino populations have been increasing during this period. Even during the 90s, the black and Latino populations increased in both the City and county.*

Data Sources

The analysis uses geographic information systems (GIS) to map residence and employment locations and calculate measures of employment and transportation access for the two counties. Data from the 2000 U.S. Census is used to (1) analyze the spatial distribution of low-income neighborhoods as well as their population characteristics (race/ethnicity, age, household structure, and education); and (2) develop profiles of the population of low-income working-age adults and their relative access to low-wage jobs and public transportation (U.S. Census Bureau 2000). The data describing low-wage jobs is from a directory provided by the American Business Institute (24).

Job access was measured by examining low-wage workers' relative access to low-wage jobs given their reliance on existing transportation networks. Information about transit service and the location of bus stops and light rail stations was collected from the NFTA. The Greater Buffalo-Niagara Frontier Transportation Council (GBNRTC) provided travel time information for the street and transit networks in Erie and Niagara Counties. These data allowed a calculation of how far low-wage workers could travel by either auto or public transit within 30 minutes; job access was measured by combining these travel distances with the number of low-wage jobs available within a 30-minute radius from neighborhoods with high concentrations of low-wage workers.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF CITIES AND SUBURBS

Table 2 presents key characteristics of the two counties' cities and suburbs. Racial minorities are concentrated in the two cities and not present in large numbers in the suburbs. Whites constitute 56 percent of the population of the City of Buffalo and 94 percent of the population of its suburbs and blacks/African Americans constitute 35 percent of the population of the city and 2 percent of the population of the suburbs. (Lewis Mumford Center 2003, U.S. Census Bureau 2000). Both Buffalo and Niagara Falls are more racially diverse than their suburbs; the contrast is starkest between Buffalo (54

percent white) and its suburbs (95 percent white). The cities of Buffalo and Niagara Falls have higher shares than their suburbs of racial minorities and low-income families.

[TABLE 2]

Perhaps not surprisingly, the cities of Buffalo and Niagara Falls have lower incomes than their suburbs, higher unemployment rates, and thus higher poverty rates. (The Census Bureau uses the federal government's official poverty definition: families and persons are classified as *below poverty* if their total family income or unrelated individual income was less than the poverty threshold specified for the applicable family size, age of householder, and number of related children under 18 present.) (U.S. Census Bureau 2000). In Buffalo, 21 percent of working age adults live below the poverty level. Among all blacks/African Americans, 37 percent in the city but only 2 percent in the suburbs live below poverty. (Nationwide, just under 11 percent of all adults 18 years of age and over live in poverty (2000 U.S. Census).) There is a greater degree of non-urban poverty in Niagara County than in Erie County.

The Journey to Work

Residents of cities and suburbs throughout the region experience typical urban travel conditions along a mix of highways, arterials, and local streets. Comparable to metropolitan areas in its peer group (St. Louis, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Cleveland, and Atlanta), the Buffalo metropolitan area has shorter commute times and lower levels of automobile use for commuting (Institute for Local Governance and Regional Growth 2000). In Buffalo, a striking 31 percent of households are without vehicles. Nevertheless, the majority of workers commute to work by automobile, although 18 percent combined ride transit and walk to work; in the City of Niagara Falls, 23 percent of households are without vehicles, and 8 percent travel to work by transit and walking. In fact, Buffalo ranks among the top ten U.S. cities for the largest share of people who walk to work (Niagara Frontier Transportation Committee 1997). In 2000, 7.3 percent of all work trips in Buffalo were made on foot, and 5.6 percent of all work trips in the region were made on foot (GBNRTC 2003). Nationwide, less than 3 percent of work trips were made on foot (2000 U.S. Census). High residential densities, low automobile ownership rates, and a dense grid of walkable streets in the City of Buffalo help to increase the walk share mode.

In both counties the majority of city residents work in the cities and the majority of suburban residents work in the suburbs. The 2000 census found fewer than 35 percent of residents of the two-county region who worked had jobs in either Buffalo or Niagara Falls, while approximately 65 percent worked in the suburbs. In Erie County, the majority of people work in the suburbs (62 percent) versus the city (36 percent); in Niagara County, 72 percent of people work in the suburbs and 26 percent work in the city. Perhaps not surprisingly, the largest group of workers in Erie County lives in one suburb and work in another (Schulman 1998), reflecting the well-documented national trend in an increase in suburb-to-suburb commuting (Pisarski 1996).

ANALYSIS

The Geography of the Population in Poverty

Like low-income residents in most U.S. cities, low-income residents in Erie and Niagara are more spatially concentrated in the two central cities than in suburbs and outlying areas. In Erie County, 65 percent of all adults in poverty live in the City of Buffalo while in Niagara County, 47 percent of all adults in poverty live in the City of Niagara Falls. The data from the U.S. Census Bureau presented in Figure 2 show that Erie County generally shows a higher degree than Niagara County of spatial concentration of adults in poverty, although adults in poverty in Niagara County are spatially

concentrated within about 3 miles (5 km) of the City of Niagara Falls' downtown (U.S Census Bureau 2000). In Niagara County, more than 50 percent of adults in poverty live within 6 miles (10 km) of the downtown Niagara Falls while in Erie County, more than 70 percent of adults in poverty live within 6 miles (10 km) of downtown Buffalo (U.S. Census Bureau 2000). There is less dispersion of the population in poverty in Buffalo and Niagara Falls than there is in larger, more sprawling cities like Los Angeles.

[FIGURE 2]

Key characteristics of neighborhoods with high concentrations of poverty are shown in Table 3 and the locations of the neighborhoods are mapped in Figure 3. Each neighborhood has more than 350 adults and more than 40 percent of working age adults (18 years of age or more) living in poverty (Jargowsky and Bane 1991). The neighborhoods are composed of individual census block groups or combinations of adjacent census block groups. Of the 12 high-poverty neighborhoods in Erie County, 11 are located within the boundaries of the City of Buffalo and only one – Lackawanna First Ward – is located outside the central city in a first-ring suburb. All three high-poverty neighborhoods in Niagara County are located in the City of Niagara Falls.

[TABLE 3]

[FIGURE 3]

In Erie County, a few high-poverty neighborhoods have particularly distressing characteristics. Masten Park has the highest poverty rate: 70 percent of working-age adults live in poverty. In the Old First Ward near downtown Buffalo, 77 percent of households do not own vehicles, which is perhaps explained by the median annual household income of just over \$7,100. The highest median annual household income (\$12,260) occurs in the Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood, where 63 percent of households do not own automobiles.

Also listed is the dominant race group for each neighborhood, and the data reveal of high degree of racial segregation. In Erie County, with the exception of three neighborhoods, all neighborhoods are more than 60 percent black/African American; one neighborhood (Jefferson Ave.) is 90 percent black/African American. In Niagara County, the downtown neighborhood is more racially mixed than the other two high-poverty neighborhoods, which are both dominated by black/African Americans. The Highland Ave. neighborhood has the largest share (89 percent) of black/African Americans.

The Geography of Low-Wage Employment

The employment data includes the number of jobs by industry for census block groups (American Business Institute 2000). Employment is disaggregated into occupational categories with both high skill requirements (such as executive and managerial, professional, and technical support occupations) and low skill requirements (such as service workers and laborers). Entry-level employment is best suited to low-skill applicants, as these occupations have lesser skill and education requirements compared to the professional occupations.

Given the fact that most welfare recipients are low-skilled women, the number of low-wage feminized occupations was estimated based on employment data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics on the sex composition of occupations and an occupational and industrial matrix developed by the California Employment Development Department. Using these data, job richness in neighborhoods (census block groups) was calculated. In the Buffalo-Niagara region, low-wage employment by census block group

ranges from zero percent to 50 percent of all jobs. On average, 26.5 percent of jobs (standard deviation 7.34) in each census block group are low wage.

The Buffalo-Niagara Falls metropolitan area has experienced sluggish job growth in the last decade (Institute for Local Governance and Regional Growth 2000). However the two industrial sectors experiencing the largest declines in the number of jobs [government and trade industries (wholesale and retail combined) and manufacturing] are sectors in which low-wage workers may seek jobs. During the same time period, the metropolitan area gained jobs in three important sectors: finance/insurance/real estate, construction, and services. The latter two industrial sectors may absorb low-income job seekers. Workers in the region had lower weekly earnings than did workers on average across New York State, and they earned less in 1997 than they did 20 years earlier. In general, earnings in the region failed to keep pace with inflation (Institute for Local Governance and Regional Growth 2000).

Employment growth in recent decades has been more rapid in suburbs than in central cities, especially in the Rustbelt. Despite the pattern of suburban job growth, the central cities of Buffalo and Niagara Falls are not job poor, and both are home to large shares of employment well-suited to low-wage workers. A large share of low-wage workers are employed in the retail and services sectors (Blumenberg and Hess 2003), and many of these jobs continue to be located in central cities. Figure 4 shows the percentage of each county's low-wage jobs as a function of distance from the central business district.

[FIGURE 4]

In Erie County, 50 percent of low-wage jobs are located within 6 miles (10 km) of downtown Buffalo and in Niagara County, 72 percent of low-wage jobs are located within 6 miles (10 km) of downtown Niagara Falls. Compared to Erie County, low-wage jobs in Niagara County are more dispersed; but still a large percentage of employment opportunities remain in the downtown area or its immediate surroundings. The curves in Figure 4 mirror the spatial distribution of adults in poverty in Figure 2, however Niagara County low-wage employment is more concentrated than adults in poverty and Erie County low-wage employment is less concentrated than its adults in poverty. (Low-wage employment in the City of Niagara Falls was given a shot in the arm when the Seneca Niagara gambling casino opened in 2000, providing more than 1,400 construction jobs and 2,300 permanent jobs ("3,000 Apply for Falls' Casino Jobs" 2002, Galarneau 2003, Hoppe 2002).)

While these measures give an indication of job-to-worker ratios on a metropolitan-wide scale, it is more useful to consider access to jobs from specific residential areas, particularly from low-income neighborhoods. Low-wage jobs are distributed throughout the metropolitan area everywhere that there is employment. However, there are several locations that have high concentrations of low-wage employment and these are shown in Figure 5.

[FIGURE 5]

Within the City of Buffalo, low wage employment is focused around downtown, medical and university districts, and in industrial and retail districts on the city's north and west sides. Outside of Buffalo and within Erie County, smaller concentrations of low-wage jobs can be found along major highways, near office parks and regional shopping malls, and in industrial sectors to the south of Buffalo. In Niagara County, low wage employment is centered around downtown Niagara Falls and in the industrial and retail area in the eastern part of the city.

Workers and Jobs

The number of jobs in a given area versus the number of working age (age 16 to 65) adults gives an indication of the availability of jobs and the number of people who are potentially competing for those jobs, although not all jobs are vacant. Table 4 calculates the ratio of jobs per person.

[TABLE 4]

There were 130,510 employed persons in the City of Buffalo in 2000 and 119,000 jobs, or 0.91 jobs in the city per employed person (U.S. Census 2000, American Business Institute 2000). Additionally, there were 1.42 low wage jobs per adult in poverty in the City of Buffalo and 0.74 low-wage jobs per adult in poverty in the suburbs. In Niagara Falls, however, there were 0.90 low-wage jobs per adult in the city and 1.16 in the suburbs. In Erie County, adults in poverty in the city had more low-wage job opportunities nearby by than those in the suburbs, while in Niagara County, the reverse is true: adults in poverty in the city had fewer low wage job opportunities than those in the suburbs. In any case, there are more low-wage jobs in the City of Buffalo than there are adults in poverty. However, because the suburbs of Buffalo surround the city on three sides, a job seeker may have access to more job opportunities in nearby city locations than in other suburbs, which may be located clear across the city.

ACCESS TO JOBS

Undoubtedly, low-wage workers' geographic access to employment varies according to their spatial proximity to appropriate job opportunities as well as their mode of travel. Distant jobs that require commutes that are complicated, lengthy and difficult to sustain on public transit may be readily accessible by automobile. This analysis reveals that both Erie County and Niagara County contain neighborhoods with mixtures of jobs and low-income residents. However, both counties also have neighborhoods in which low-wage workers live far from concentrations of low-wage employment. The data show that most jobs in the metropolitan area, even distant jobs, are accessible within a 30-minute commute in a private vehicle. In contrast, access to employment opportunities among transit-dependent recipients is highly variable and is contingent on the neighborhoods in which low-wage workers live and their proximity to employment centers.

A low-wage job access measure was determined using a traditional gravity model to capture the number of accessible low-wage jobs located within 3 miles (5 km) of census block groups. All census block groups whose zone centroids are within a three-mile radius from block group i are identified. Given that the probability of a low-wage worker finding employment decays with distance, block groups within one mile are weighted by one and block groups beyond one mile are weighted by one divided by the square of the distance between the two centroids. In this way, jobs in closer proximity are modeled as more attractive than jobs at greater distances.

After a low-wage accessibility measure is assigned to each census block group, all census block groups in the city are ranked from highest to lowest accessibility; accessibility quartiles among all census block groups are defined and the population in poverty is summed for each quartile. Table 5 shows the distribution of the low-income population across neighborhoods of varying job richness.

[TABLE 5]

In general, the data show that the majority of low-wage workers in both counties live in neighborhoods that fall within the top two quartiles in terms of job richness. In Erie and Niagara counties 72 and 67 percent of the population in poverty, respectively, live in neighborhoods in close proximity to a reasonable number of low-wage jobs. In these job-rich neighborhoods, the larger issue is whether low-wage workers can effectively compete for local jobs since the number of low-wage job seekers tends to

exceed the number of low-wage employment opportunities. There is evidence to suggest that some low-wage workers will have difficulty competing even in the low-wage labor market since they often have multiple employment barriers that individually and in combination reduce their likelihood of competing successfully for employment (2, 5, 26).

Both counties also have neighborhoods in which adults in poverty is isolated from employment. Niagara County has the higher share of adults in poverty (21 percent) living in such isolated, job-poor neighborhoods while Erie County has 12 percent living in block groups at the bottom quartile of low-wage job richness. These differences may be explained by (1) a higher overall degree of low-wage job access in Erie County owing to the density of residence and employment locations and the structure of the transportation network; and (2) a higher degree of non-urban poverty in Niagara County which is more remote from employment opportunities. For adults in poverty living in these job-poor areas, jobs are scarce and employment typically requires commuting to job sites in other neighborhoods. For example, various communities on the west side of Buffalo, located 2 to 5 miles (3 to 8 km) north and west of downtown, have large shares of adults in poverty but relatively few jobs and commuting to the job-rich east side can take longer than 30 minutes during peak periods. In perfect conditions and without transfers, travel by bus across Buffalo (for example, from North Buffalo to the East Side) can take well over an hour. This estimate is arrived at using transit schedules to estimate travel times. Depending on the origin and destination of the trip, the journey may require at least one transfer.

Many suburban neighborhoods in the metropolitan area are also job poor. Although employment is growing faster in the suburbs than in the central city, suburban jobs are in general highly dispersed. In Niagara County, many of the job-poor neighborhoods are located outside of the urbanized area. Approximately 40 percent of Niagara County's low-wage jobs are located in the non-urbanized areas of the county, dispersed throughout approximately 470 square miles (1,217 square km) of small towns and agricultural land. Naturally, job densities tend to be much lower in these rural areas than in the urbanized area. Even in these neighborhoods of relative job isolation, low-wage workers with access to automobiles can reach many employment opportunities within a reasonable commute time. However, for transit dependents, long-distance commutes may limit their likelihood of finding jobs and sustaining difficult commutes to employment.

Continuing to measure neighborhood job access, low-income worker's relative access to low-wage jobs was examined given their reliance on existing transportation networks. Job access was measured by combining travel distances with the number of low-wage jobs available. To conduct this analysis, 30-minute travel buffers for automobile and public transit travel were defined around the centroids of each neighborhood using the transportation networks. The analysis was supplemented by travel time data from an origin and destination matrix produced by the GBNRTC. Table 6 shows the percentage of low-wage jobs available within a 30-minute commute by two modes (automobile and public transit) from neighborhoods in Erie and Niagara Counties with high concentrations of adults in poverty. The transit/automobile job access ratios are depicted graphically in Figure 6.

[TABLE 6]

[FIGURE 6]

In all cases, commuting by private vehicle versus traveling by public transit allows residents access to at least twice as many low-wage jobs. Interestingly, the ratio of the number of jobs accessible within a 30-minute commute by car to the number of jobs accessible within a 30-minute commute on public transit varies only slightly across neighborhoods. Only one neighborhood is distinguished for its high ratio. In the Lackawanna First Ward neighborhood, immediately south of the City of Buffalo's southern border, eight times as many jobs are accessible by automobile as accessible by public transit. This is likely due to

the neighborhood's geographic isolation along the Lake Erie shore and its proximity to only one arterial. Apart from the Lackawanna neighborhood, all other neighborhoods in Erie County have two or more jobs accessible by automobile for every job accessible by public transit. In Niagara County, automobiles provide slightly less of an advantage in reaching low-wage jobs in the two neighborhoods away from downtown. Compared to similar research in California, which found ratios of automobile to public transit job accessibility of 70 in Monterey Park east of downtown Los Angeles, 59 in Watts south of downtown Los Angeles, and 29 in Pleasanton southeast of Oakland, public transit job accessibility in Buffalo is relatively reasonable (Blumenberg and Hess 2003). In light of these comparisons, public transit job accessibility in the Buffalo-Niagara region compares reasonably well to automobile access. Interestingly, workers living in downtown Buffalo can reach three times as many jobs by automobile as public transit, and workers in downtown Niagara Falls can reach 2.4 times as many jobs by automobile as public transit. This perhaps reflects an overall reduction in transit service over the past several decades that has lessened the locational advantage of living in a city's core.

The relative advantage of cars shrinks in neighborhoods that are proximate to employment. For example, in Erie County, low income residents living in three neighborhoods on Buffalo's East Side—Broadway Fillmore, Kenfield, and Masten Park—are able to reach a fair number of jobs within a 30-minute commute on public transit. As Table 6 shows, the prospects are even better for low-income residents living in two neighborhoods in Niagara County where the ratio between job access by automobile to that of public transit is less than two to one. In these neighborhoods, public transit may be an effective mode of travel. However, it is likely that some low-wage workers living in these neighborhoods will still prefer to travel by automobile. The disadvantages of public transit, particularly for low-income workers, especially women with children, may include long headways, limited service hours, costs, difficulties using transit to make multiple stops on the way to or from work; and safety issues particularly after dark (need a citation here).

Few Immigrant Communities

The existence of only one suburban low-income neighborhood within the entire Buffalo-Niagara region is surprising since suburban pockets of poverty are becoming more prevalent throughout U.S. metropolitan areas. In growing regions of the country (such as Los Angeles, Houston, and Atlanta), immigrants from both other countries and the U.S. increasingly locate in suburban neighborhoods where housing demand is high. This phenomenon has challenged the classical spatial assimilation theory. For example, immigrants increasingly live in the suburban portion of metropolitan Chicago, which now, for the first time in history, has a larger immigrant population than the city of Chicago. As a result of the shift to the suburbs, new immigrants are less likely to move to certain older port-of-entry neighborhoods in the city (Paral and Norkewicz, 2003, 5). Research has shown that Asian populations were more likely to immigrate directly to the suburbs than other ethnic groups (Alba and Nee 2003). Furthermore, the Black/African American population exceeds 50 percent of the total population of certain suburbs in some U.S. cities (including Newark, Miami, Atlanta, Cleveland, St. Louis, Chicago, Washington, D.C. and Ft. Lauderdale) but the Buffalo-Niagara region lacks suburbs that are majority black/African American (Logan 2003).

In contrast to growing regions, the Buffalo-Niagara region is not experiencing growth and thus has little difficulty accommodating newcomers. There are few suburban neighborhoods with concentrated poverty and those that do exist are in first-ring suburbs (such as Cheektowaga and Lackawanna). Today, Buffalo's East and West Sides swell with vibrant populations of Hispanics and other immigrant groups, but outside the central city, only Lackawanna is notable for its strong community of Arab immigrants (Institute for Local Governance and Regional Growth 2000). The city's solid housing stock easily satisfies the housing demand of newcomers to the area, and this phenomenon serves to propagate the city as the home to the low-income population. Buffalo's hallmark housing type – two family “double”

houses with upper and lower flats – provide housing for moderate- and low-income families throughout the city and similar affordable housing is not as prevalent in the suburbs.

Among metropolitan regions in the U.S., Buffalo is unique in its low number of foreign-born persons and its lack of suburban communities for immigrants to settle in. In recent years, Buffalo has “lost” more immigrants, meaning that the percentage of immigrants among the general population has declined. This has occurred despite an increase in the number of foreign-born immigrants moving to the Buffalo area, which suggests that many immigrants are not staying long in Buffalo before moving to other regions of the country. As a result of the decline of the number of immigrants, Buffalo had fewer immigrants living in the metropolitan area in 2000 than in 1990; the poor economy and a lack of large numbers of fellow immigrants may have played an important role in the shrinking of this group.

CONCLUSIONS

This study finds that (1) jobs throughout the metropolitan region are centralized in the cities of Buffalo and Niagara Falls; (2) poverty is highly centralized in these cities, more so than the general population; and (3) the greatest access to low-wage employment occurs in centrally located neighborhoods. Based on the spatial distribution of low-wage employment and concentrations of poverty, central city locations had significant advantages in terms of proximity to jobs.

Contrary to the spatial mismatch literature, low-income neighborhoods in Buffalo had superior access rather than inferior access to employment, especially when the analysis was restricted to low-wage employment. This conclusion echoes findings in recent years in other places. For example, African Americans in Boston and Houston are not disadvantaged relative to whites with regard to spatial access to employment. This result holds even when making allowances for black disadvantage in search and transportation capabilities and when focusing on spatial mismatch in low-wage employment (Cohn and Fossett 1996). In the Buffalo-Niagara region, residential segregation does not appear to spatially isolate poverty from jobs. On the contrary, segregation confines adults in poverty to the central city, closest to the largest concentrations of entry-level and low-wage employment. The close proximity of the suburbs to the central city and the network of grid and radial streets connecting the two places make suburban job access reasonable. However, adults in poverty have poorer access to automotive transport than whites, and as a result they may be able to search for jobs only within an area bounded by a smaller radius.

While the residents of Buffalo’s low-income neighborhoods may have an advantage in spatial proximity to employment, unemployment rates do not reveal an advantage in maintaining jobs. Unemployment rates are significantly higher in the Cities of Buffalo and Niagara Falls than in their suburbs; unemployment rates are high in low-income neighborhoods and neighborhoods with high concentrations of poverty. However, the evidence from this study suggest that a spatial mismatch does not play a major role. What explains persistent poverty endemic to certain places? I do not rely on a single explanation for high unemployment rates and concentrated poverty. In the Buffalo-Niagara region, declining demand for low-skill labor driven by deindustrialization and changes in the occupational mix toward jobs with higher education requirements seems to play only a minor role (Kasarda 1990, Institute for Regional Governance and Local Growth 1990). Perhaps other forces are at work here, including a lack of job readiness and the skills to sustain employment, as well as employer discrimination (Kirschenman & Neckerman 1991).

Recommendations

The research suggests that the spatial mismatch hypothesis, which describes the mismatch between concentrations of low-income households in central cities with limited access to suburban employment opportunities, is perhaps too narrowly drawn to describe metropolitan areas with varied urban structure.

Based on the spatial distribution of low-wage employment and concentrations of poverty, central city locations have significant advantages in the Buffalo-Niagara region in terms of proximity to jobs. In this region, neighborhoods with high concentrations of poverty appear to be more heterogeneous than they are in other metropolitan areas.

There are a variety of forces at work throughout various places in the two counties – economic, social and demographic forces – which shape the characteristics of the low-income population and the employment market. However, while these broader regional dynamics may influence the number, location, and composition of neighborhoods, they do not alter the fundamental neighborhood characteristics that form the basis for targeting transportation policies to low-income communities. These characteristics include the density of adults in poverty and other low-income households, the proximity of suitable employment opportunities, and current levels of public transportation. Policies and services should be targeted to neighborhoods where there are high concentrations of low-wage jobs and neighborhoods where there are low concentrations of low-wage jobs.

High Concentrations of Low-Wage Jobs

Public transit is most efficient in geographic areas with relatively high concentrations of origins and destinations. Public transit can be effective in job-rich neighborhoods with high residential densities where workers can travel to jobs and other destinations within a reasonable length of time. In such places, policymakers should focus on enhancing existing public transportation services. Enhancements might include adding bus routes in areas with limited service, increasing capacity by adding additional vehicles and shortening headways, and adding off-peak service to better accommodate night and weekend work schedules as well as non-work travel. Such modifications would greatly increase job opportunities for low-income residents in neighborhoods throughout Buffalo's East Side and in the City of Niagara Falls.

Since a high percentage of workers in Buffalo walk to work, owing to the traditional urban form and low automobile ownership rates, policies should be undertaken to encourage people to continue to walking. Future changes to the urban form should not reduce pedestrianism.

The analysis revealed that there are some job-rich places, mostly in the suburbs, that do not have high concentrations of low-income workers nearby. From many job-poor neighborhoods, even if adults in poverty could easily walk to a transit stop and board a bus or train, they would not get to their destinations within a reasonable amount of time because of lengthy transit travel times. Suburban employment centers such as the University at Buffalo's North Campus and nearby office development provide potential entry-level employment opportunities for recipients, but such places are often located great distances from places with concentrations of low-income workers. To benefit residents of such neighborhoods, it is important to establish services that ease the burden of long-distance commutes, such as the NFTA's ambitious HubLink project, announced in the 1990s but not implemented, designed to facilitate movement between first and second ring communities (Collison 1996, Collison 1997, Lyons and vanderWilden 2002). The proposal called for 20 hubs, or transfer stations, located mostly in the suburbs for city residents heading to outlying jobs; new and revised routes would link the hubs to one another and the city center and suburban jobsites. The hubs are designed as "reverse commuting" destinations for city residents heading to jobs in the suburbs.

Low Concentrations of Low-Wage Jobs

In job-poor neighborhoods where there is little population below poverty, it is likely that cars are the best and most efficient transportation option. For example, in the non-urbanized areas of Niagara County, both jobs and low-income workers are less concentrated and travel is more difficult for those without

access to automobiles. The data show that spatial access to employment remains relatively high among low-income workers living in these areas since many have reliable access to personal vehicles. In contrast, although they are few in numbers, transit-dependent low-income workers living in these areas have only limited access to employment opportunities within a reasonable commute distance. The principal challenge to policymakers, therefore, is how best to serve the transit-dependent rural population who are few in number and widely dispersed. While perhaps politically problematic, facilitating access to reliable automobiles (or low-cost jitney services for those unable or unlicensed to drive) may be the most cost-effective approach for these low-wage workers.

In addition to recommendations geared largely to the transportation system, other measures can be taken to increase access to low wage jobs such as (1) local economic development in job poor areas; and (2) workforce development in areas of concentrated poverty to improve job readiness, placement and support services to increase retention in employment.

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TABLE 1. Previous Studies of Welfare Recipients' Access to Employment

City-Region (reference)	Spatial Mismatch	Type of Spatial Mismatch	Access to Public Transit
Atlanta, GA (12, 13)	High	Central City-Suburb; Suburb to Suburb	Low
Boston, MA (15) (27) (Cohn and Fossett 1996)	High Variable Low	Central City-Suburb Neighborhood Neighborhood	Low na High
Chicago, IL (17, 16)	Medium	Central City-Suburb	High
Cleveland, OH (18)	High	Central City-Suburb	Low
Detroit, MI (1, 19)	High	Central City-Suburb; Suburb-to-Suburb	Low
Houston (Cohn and Fossett 1996)	Low	Central City-Suburb; Suburb-to-Suburb	Low
Los Angeles, CA (20) (Blumenberg and Hess 2003)	Variable Medium	Neighborhood Neighborhood	Varies Varies
Milwaukee, WI (16, 28)	High	Central City-Suburb	Low
Oakland, CA (4) (Blumenberg and Hess 2003)	Variable Medium	Variable Variable	Variable Variable
Philadelphia, PA (16)	Medium	Neighborhood; Inner-city gaps	Low
St. Louis, Missouri (19)	Low	1.9 jobs in the city for every employed city resident	na

TABLE 2. Key Characteristics of Cities and Suburbs

Characteristic	City of Buffalo	Rest of Erie County	Erie County Total	City of Niagara Falls	Rest of Niagara County	Niagara County
<i>Population</i>						
Number of persons	292,600	640,400	950,300	55,700	158,900	219,800
Population change (1990-2000)	-10.8 %	+ 2.7 %	- 1.9 %	-9.9 %	+ 3.3 %	- 0.4 %
<i>Employment and Earnings</i>						
Median household income (1999)	\$ 24,500	na	\$ 38,600	\$ 26,800	na	\$ 38,100
Households on public assistance (1999)	10.3 %	1.7 %	4.5 %	7.0 %	2.8 %	4.0 %
Unemployment rate	12.0 %	5.3 %	7.3 %	10.1 %	4.9 %	6.1 %
Poverty rate among working-age adults	20.6 %	5.1 %	9.7 %	15.9 %	8.2 %	8.5 %
<i>Demographic</i>						
White	54.4 %	94.5 %	82.2 %	76.2 %	95.6 %	90.7 %
Black/African American	37.2 %	2.2 %	13.0 %	18.7 %	1.9 %	6.1 %
<i>Transportation to Work</i>						
Drove (carpool/single occupancy)	79.9 %	94.3 %	90.6 %	89.1 %	94.9 %	93.6 %
Transit	12.3 %	1.2 %	4.1 %	3.1 %	0.5 %	1.1 %
Walked	5.3 %	1.7 %	2.7 %	5.2 %	2.2 %	2.8 %
Households without vehicle	31.4 %	7.0 %	15.1 %	22.5 %	6.4 %	11.1 %
Mean travel time to work (minutes)	21.2	na	21.3	17.1	na	20.1
<i>Work location</i>						
Job in city	60.2 %	26.7 %	35.5 %	54.9 %	17.6 %	25.8 %
Job in suburbs	38.2 %	70.3 %	61.9 %	44.3 %	79.2 %	71.5 %

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 1990 and 2000. Summary Files 1, 2, and 3.

TABLE 3. Characteristics of Neighborhoods with High Concentrations of Poverty

Neighborhood	Dist. To CBD (miles)	Number Of Adults	Adult Poverty Rate	Households Without Automobile	Median Annual Household Income	Largest Race Group
<i>Erie County</i>						
Bailey Delevan	5.1	570	56 %	63 %	\$ 9,750	Black/Afr. Amer. 90 %
Best Street	1.4	912	53 %	50 %	\$ 11,860	Black/Afr. Amer. 94 %
Broadway Fillmore	2.5	3,614	49 %	63 %	\$ 12,260	Black/Afr. Amer. 59 %
Downtown Buffalo	0	371	54 %	49 %	\$ 9,580	Black/Afr. Amer. 78 %
Grant Ferry	2.3	511	58 %	43 %	\$ 11,700	White 46 % Hispanic/Latino 32 %
Hinman	4.8	432	51 %	54 %	\$ 11,229	White 50 %
Jefferson Ave	1.2	1,669	49 %	67 %	\$ 10,430	Black/Afr. Amer. 96 %
Kenfield	4.9	956	54 %	61 %	\$ 10,660	Black/Afr. Amer. 93 %
Lackawanna First Ward	4.3	589	60 %	73 %	\$ 8,910	Black/Afr. Amer. 82 %
Lower West Side	1.1	3,669	50 %	60 %	\$ 10,780	Black/Afr. Amer. 41 % Hispanic/Latino 50 %
Masten Park	1.8	162	70 %	45 %	\$ 8,125	Black/Afr. Amer. 84 %
Old First Ward	0.9	673	65 %	77 %	\$ 7,110	Black/Afr. Amer. 65%
<i>Niagara County</i>						
Niagara Falls downtown	0.5	554	44 %	57 %	\$15,682	Black/Afr. Amer. 51 %
Niagara Falls mid-city	1.2	544	44 %	45 %	\$15,938	Black/Afr. Amer. 62 %
Highland Ave	2.6	384	64 %	53 %	\$ 8,470	Black/Afr. Amer. 89%

Source: U.S. Bureau of Census (2000), Summary Files 1 and 3

TABLE 4. Jobs per Person in City and Suburb

	Erie County		Niagara County	
	City of Buffalo	Suburban Erie County	City of Niagara Falls	Suburban Niagara County
Jobs	119,000	178,600	23,200	36,400
Adults	183,400	542,600	28,900	141,400
Jobs per adult	0.65	0.33	0.80	0.26
Low –wage jobs	28,800	42,800	5,200	8,900
Adults in poverty	41,100	31,700	4,700	10,300
Low-wage jobs per adult in poverty	1.42	0.74	0.90	1.16

Source: American Business Institute (1999); U.S. Bureau of Census (2000), Summary Files 1 and 3.

Table 5. Relative Proximity to Employment

Quartiles representing access to low-wage employment	Percentage of adult population in poverty	
	Erie County	Niagara County
High access	37 %	31 %
↕	35 %	36 %
	16 %	12 %
Low access	12 %	21 %

Table 6. Automobile and Transit Access to Low-Wage Jobs from Neighborhoods with High Concentrations of Poverty

Neighborhood	Accessible jobs within a 30-minute commute		Ratio of Automobile to Public Transit Job Accessibility (3) = (2)/(1)
	Public Transit (1)	Automobile (2)	
<i>Erie County</i>			
Bailey Delevan	25,100	66,200	2.6
Best Street	26,700	65,600	2.5
Broadway Fillmore	32,200	65,800	2.0
Downtown Buffalo	21,400	64,600	3.0
Grant Ferry	24,100	64,600	2.7
Hinman	27,900	66,200	2.4
Jefferson Ave	26,300	65,600	2.5
Kenfield	30,600	65,500	2.1
Lackawanna First Ward	7,400	60,900	8.2
Lower West Side	20,800	64,700	3.1
Masten Park	32,900	65,100	2.0
Old First Ward	19,300	64,400	3.3
<i>Niagara County</i>			
Niagara Falls downtown	6,400	15,500	2.4
Niagara Falls mid-city	6,200	11,700	1.9
Highland Ave	6,000	9,900	1.7



FIGURE 1. Study Area Map

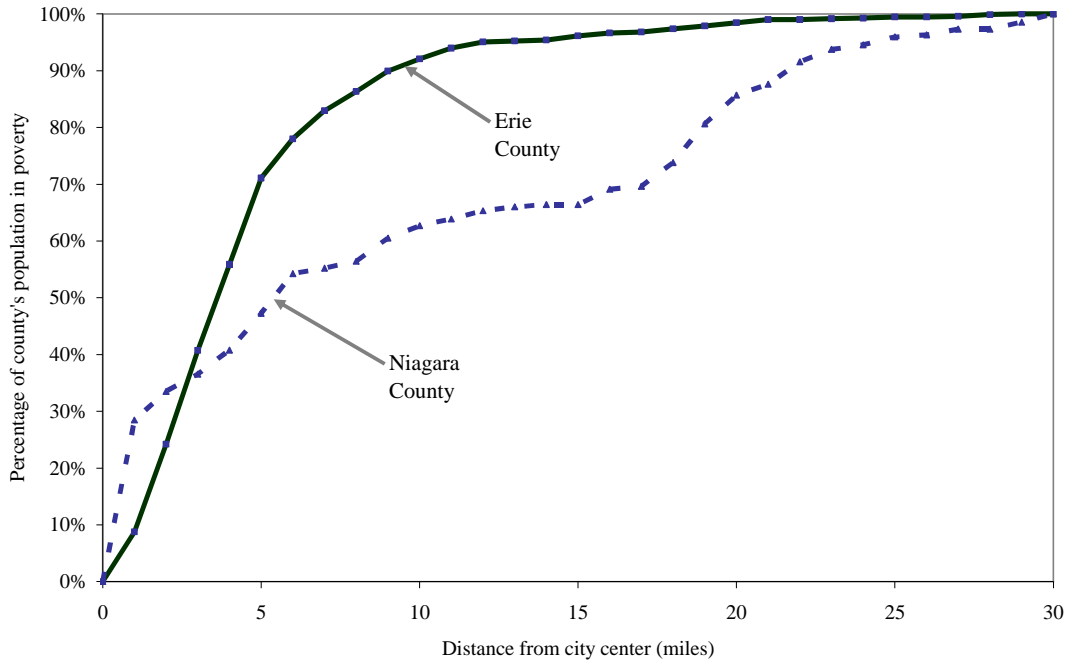


FIGURE 2. Spatial Distribution of the Population in Poverty

Source: U.S. Bureau of Census (2000), Summary File 1.

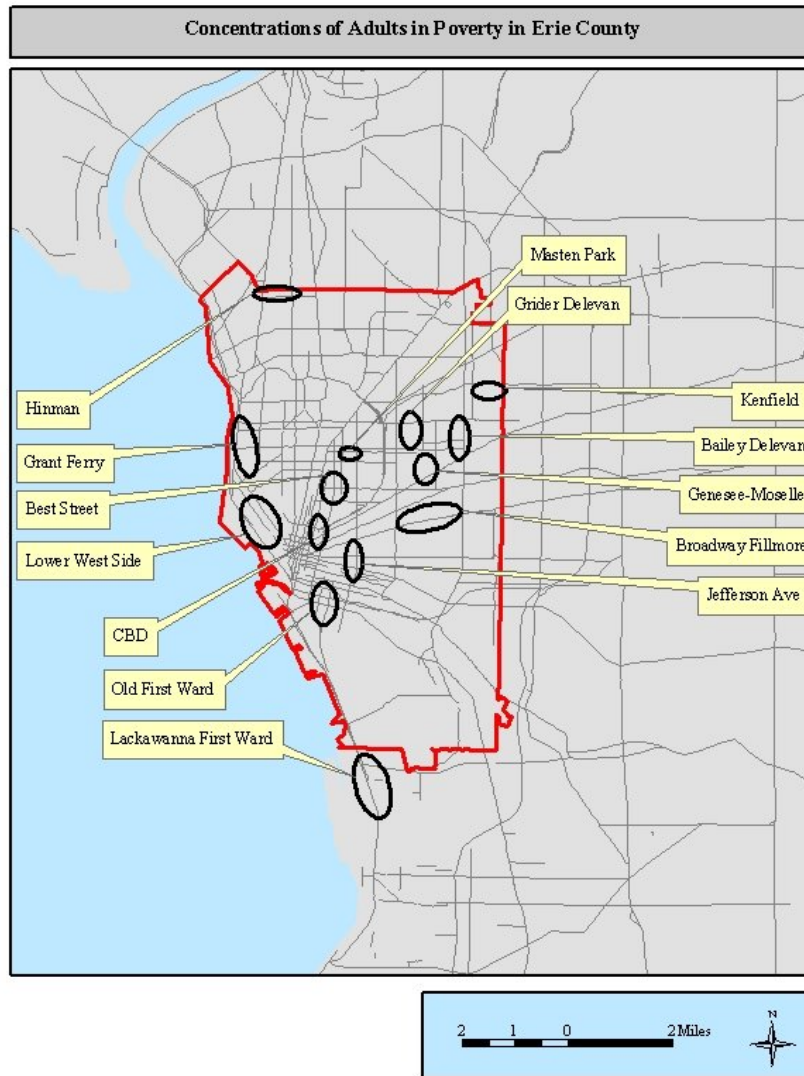


FIGURE 3. Concentrations of Adults in Poverty in Erie and Niagara Counties

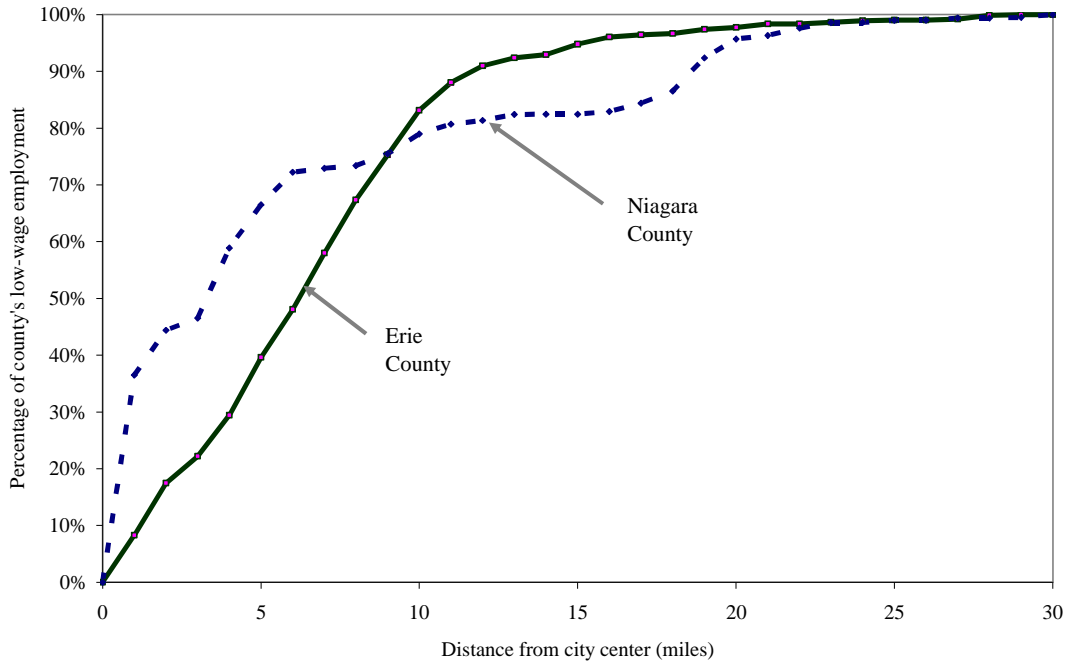


FIGURE 4. Spatial Distribution of Low-Wage Employment

Source: American Business Institute (2000).

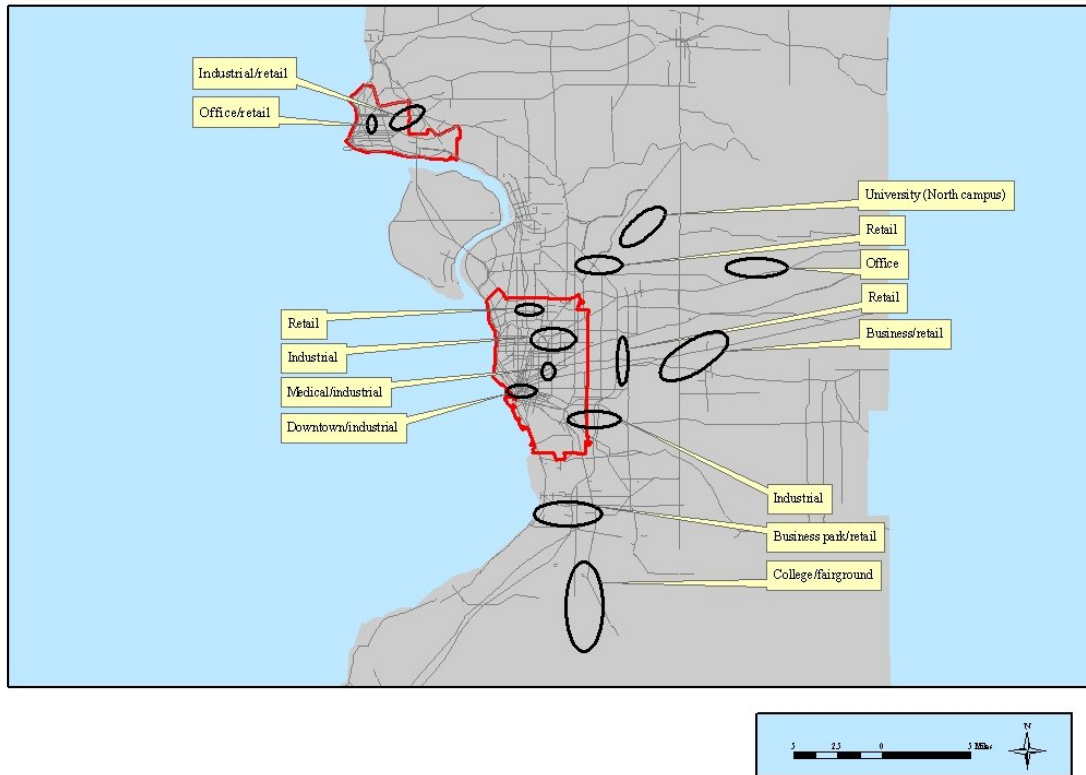


FIGURE 5. Concentrations of Low-Wage Employment in Erie and Niagara Counties

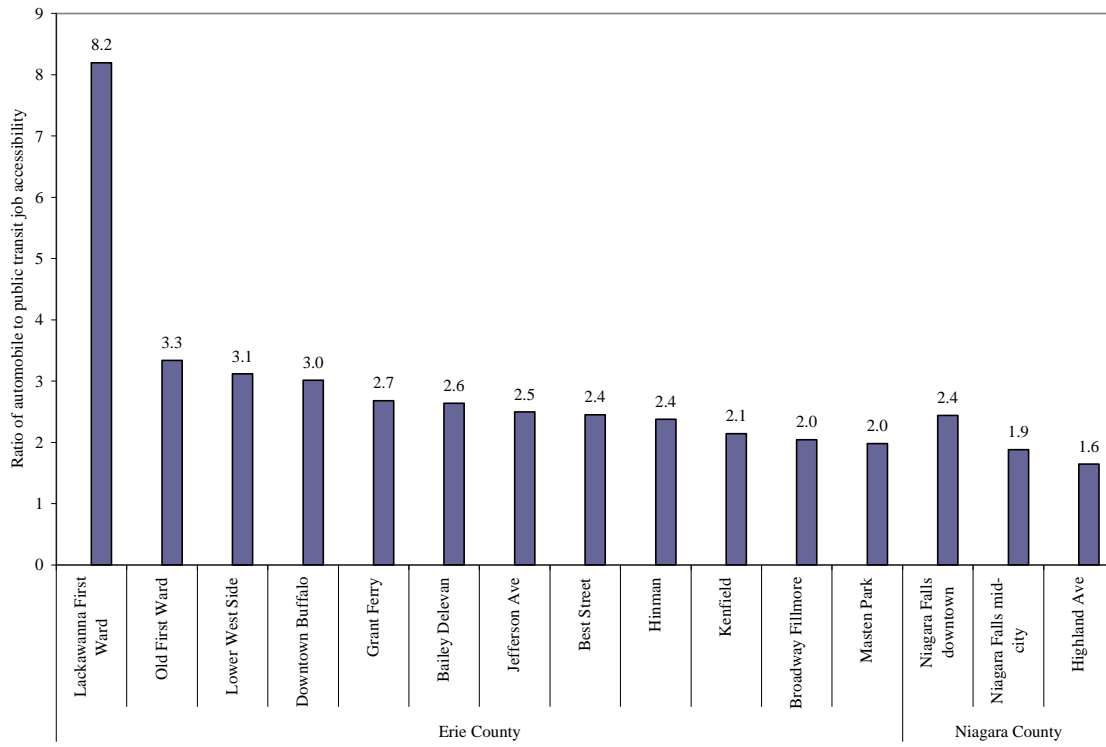


FIGURE 6. Ratio of Automobile to Public Transit Job Accessibility