

Pittsburgh Community Reinvestment Group: Testimony to the Pennsylvania House Transportation Subcommittee, Republican and Democratic Policy Committees

Representative Markosek, Representative Geist, members of the House majority and minority public policy committees, welcome to Pittsburgh and thank you for holding these hearings on such a vital issue in crisis. And, as I have seen from news clippings around the state, it is clear that all of us recognize what a crisis this really is.

Transportation is at the heart of how we conduct ourselves in a civil society. Without a robust and diverse transportation system, we cannot put food on the table, keep a roof over our head, and get to work or school. Yet, for decades, Pennsylvania has spent most of its time building out into the hinterlands rather than investing in the robust infrastructure that built it into an economic powerhouse in the first place. Our choices have caught up with us, with roads crumbling and – near and dear to western PA – bridges in danger of being closed or worse, falling into the chasm they span. PennDOT seems to have taken to heart a “fix-it-first” approach and the Keystone Principles are a roadmap for concentrating our investment so that we don’t continue to build an unaffordable system. Obviously the money needs to be addressed.

Much has been made of crumbling infrastructure over the years, and what it means to the economy. What is too often overlooked, however, is the role mass transit of all forms plays in our national and local economy. It is vital to the survival of our cities – every city across this Commonwealth – and, without it, our crumbling infrastructure becomes even more unaffordable than it currently is now. As requested, for testimonial purposes, I am going to focus on Southwestern Pennsylvania – Districts 11 and 12 – for the sake of my testimony.

Southwestern Pennsylvania is home to mass transit operators, serving a market of over 2.5 million taxpayers. The largest, of course, is the Port Authority. I will come back to them in a minute, but first it is important to recognize that the other 5 operators are just as vital to our region’s economic health and many have been growing in ridership for years.

It’s also important to remember this: for a region our size, we are far more reliant on transit than other cities. Places 2, 3 times as large as southwestern PA don’t have the ridership numbers we have. This is important in order to understand the economic impact of the current crisis. It’s also important to recognize that mass transit works in most Pennsylvania counties.

The Port Authority of Allegheny County is the cornerstone of our mass transit system, and I am sure you are aware – or harbor some thoughts of your own – about its viability. Considered too bloated, too inefficient, too secret, the Port Authority has made many changes since the 2006 Transportation Funding and Reform Commission findings were released. Pensions and healthcare were renegotiated. 15% of the system was cut, taking out nearly all of the slack. A \$1.1m route restructuring is underway to make it even more efficient. However, even with all this, service cuts continue to threaten the region – especially with the failure of Act 44. With no slack left in the system please understand: these cut are dire, impact taxpayers of all stripes, and threaten the economy of southwestern Pennsylvania. And let me be clear: these are voting, working, taxpayers. Over 70% of the region’s transit riders work full-time.

On Monday, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette reported that the Port Authority’s \$50 million gap could result in service cuts of 25% or more. What this means is 55,000 people or more could be stranded daily, forcing them to spend \$8,100 each – over \$420 million countywide - more per year to live their lives. So, let’s put this into economic terms:

- To save the Commonwealth \$50 million, we are asking Allegheny County taxpayers to spend \$420 million annually. This sounds like the most classic case of sending good money after bad. Do YOU have an extra \$8,000 lying around?

- This \$420 million does not stay in the region, or the Commonwealth, for that matter. It goes to companies like BP, Toyota, Kia, and Chevron. So, we're asking Pennsylvania taxpayers to participate in economic and workforce development in regions and countries far flung from our own. The story is the same in the other 51 counties - Pennsylvania creates jobs elsewhere when transit gets cut.
- While we create jobs for others elsewhere, and contribute to a national security threat, hundreds - possibly thousands locally - risk losing their OWN jobs. These are not just bus and trolley operators, or mechanics:
 - 50% of all Downtown workers – over 40,000 - take transit, 30% in Oakland. 3% of Downtown vehicles are buses. For our region, these numbers are not small. Over 40% of Allegheny County's jobs are in Pittsburgh and Oakland. Yet, downtown, 3% of the vehicles – buses and LRT – bring half of us to work. You think Downtown is crowded now? Add at least 30 minutes to your commute from where we stand, and you start to see the picture.
 - And where will those people park? Our garages are 90% full. We already pay close to the highest parking fees in the nation, and parking garages cost \$17,000 – per space – to build. Can we afford new garages?
 - Finally, we are fooling ourselves if we think those jobs will simply leave downtown for Monroeville, Cranberry, Southpointe, or some other suburban center. If it were possible, they would already have done so, like most regions our size. 2/3 of our jobs are in the city – in fact, Pittsburgh has more jobs than residents. We have the nation's 6th – densest employment center for a reason – people can't drive across town to go to work. So where will the jobs go? Out. Out of the region.
- Can our roads – also facing a funding crisis – handle another 40,000+ cars daily? At least 14 million more trips per year? How much new asphalt will we need to lay? Where can you put an 8-lane Parkway, let alone pay for it? In 2004-05, we spent over \$110 million to resurface 6 miles of I-79. That dwarfs what it would cost – billions - to widen our Parkway East and West, over decades, to accommodate this new traffic.

One of the most vulnerable populations – our seniors – are in dire need of robust transit. In southwestern Pennsylvania, especially, this is a huge issue. Isolation of seniors causes all kinds of social and health ills, and not protecting Our Greatest Generation – the ones who built America, the ones who turn out to vote no matter what – hurts us all and damages our legacy as Americans.

There is no question that you, our representatives, have a daunting task ahead of you. In the face of a \$1+ billion shortfall this year and looming multi-billion deficit for 2010-11, transportation is but one of the crises. However, this has been a growing problem for years and will continue to do so. In this decade alone, we have faced several funding crises for transit and transportation. We strongly urge Legislators to support the funding levels recommended by the Transportation Advisory Committee. We also urge you to look at a menu of funding opportunities – vehicle registration, tolls, increased efficiencies in purchases, gasoline taxes, and so on – to provide a stable base of funding to the system.

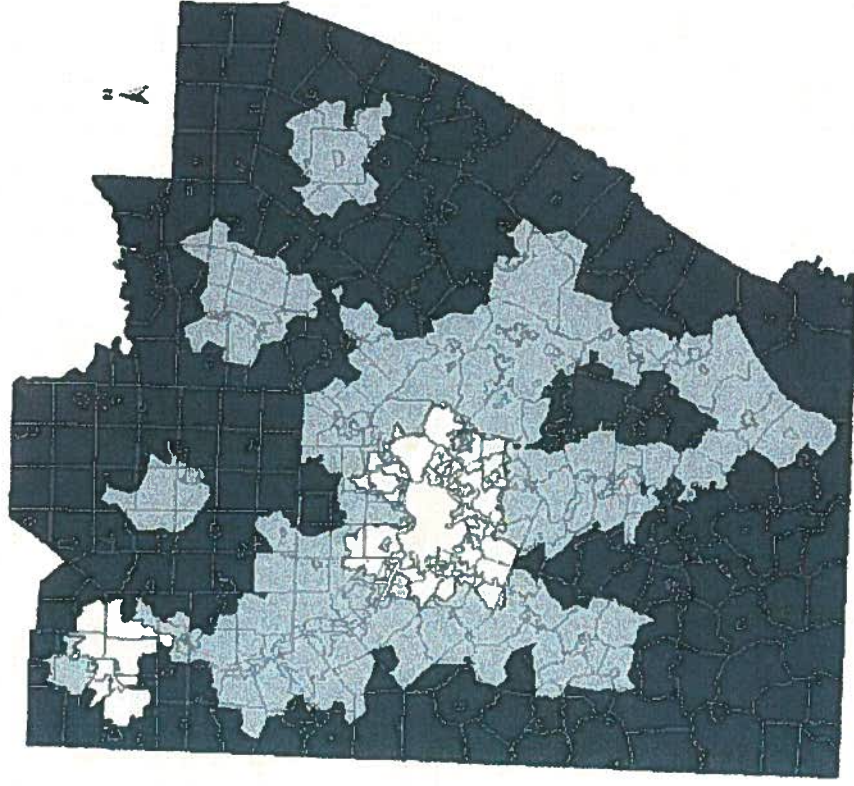
Pittsburgh is unique. Pittsburgh is special. Cities two, three times our size don't use transit as much as we do, nor are they as reliant on landmark bridges that are in some cases over a century old. In Sunbelt cities, they're actually spending billions to build a system with comparable reach. Why? Because robust transit means a robust, stable economy with opportunity for all. It's the cornerstone of a thriving community, and its stability contributed to our own stability during these horrendous economic times. People from all walks ride transit. Rich, poor, black, white, Republican, Democrat, suburbanite, city dweller. Without it, Pennsylvania risks an even further slide that it can ill-afford. Thank you.

**Testimony to the Pennsylvania House
Transportation Subcommittee, Republican
and Democratic Policy Committees**

**PennDOT Districts 11 and 12
Gateway High School; Monroeville, PA
June 18, 2010**

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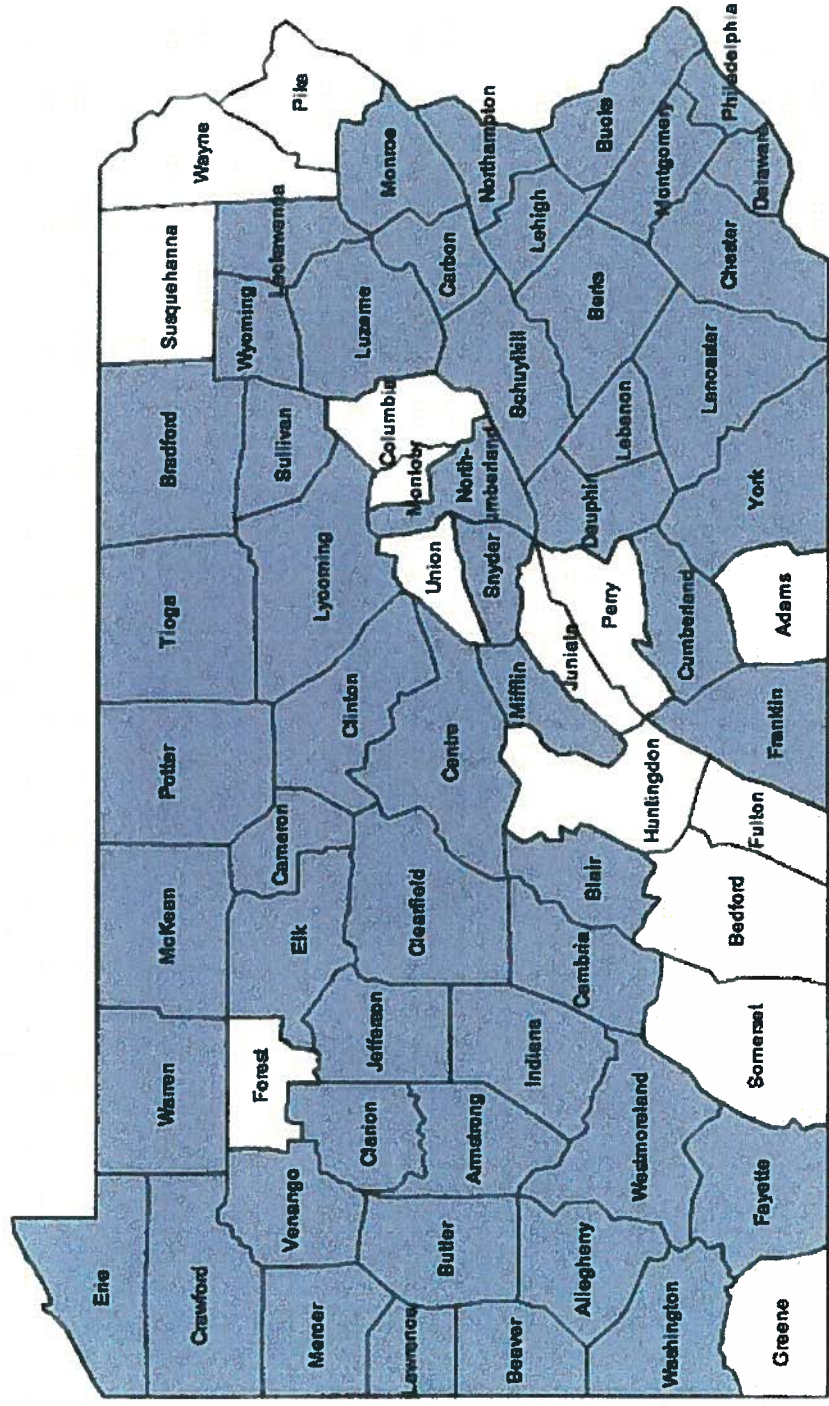
Southwestern PA is heavily reliant upon transit for our daily life



Pittsburgh Ranks:

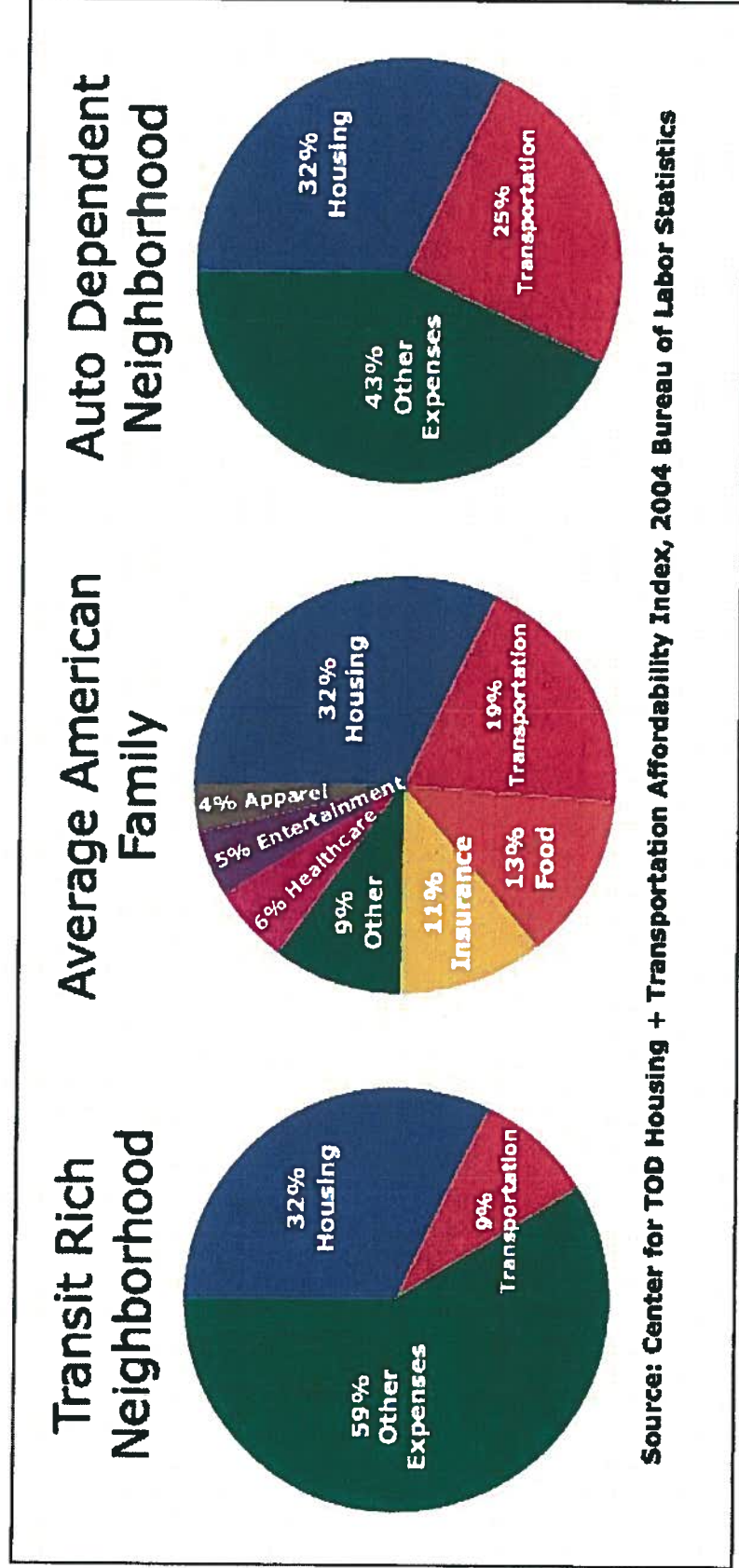
- 21st by metro population
- 17th by transit ridership
- 43rd by transit operating expenditure budget

51 Pennsylvania counties – 76% - rely on mass transit



Source: Bureau of Public Transportation, PennDOT

Affordable living isn't just about housing.



Pittsburgh transit riders save an average of \$8,116 annually, per person, in transportation costs.

Cutting transit isn't good math... or economics

Transit Cuts from State Funding Gap: \$50 million

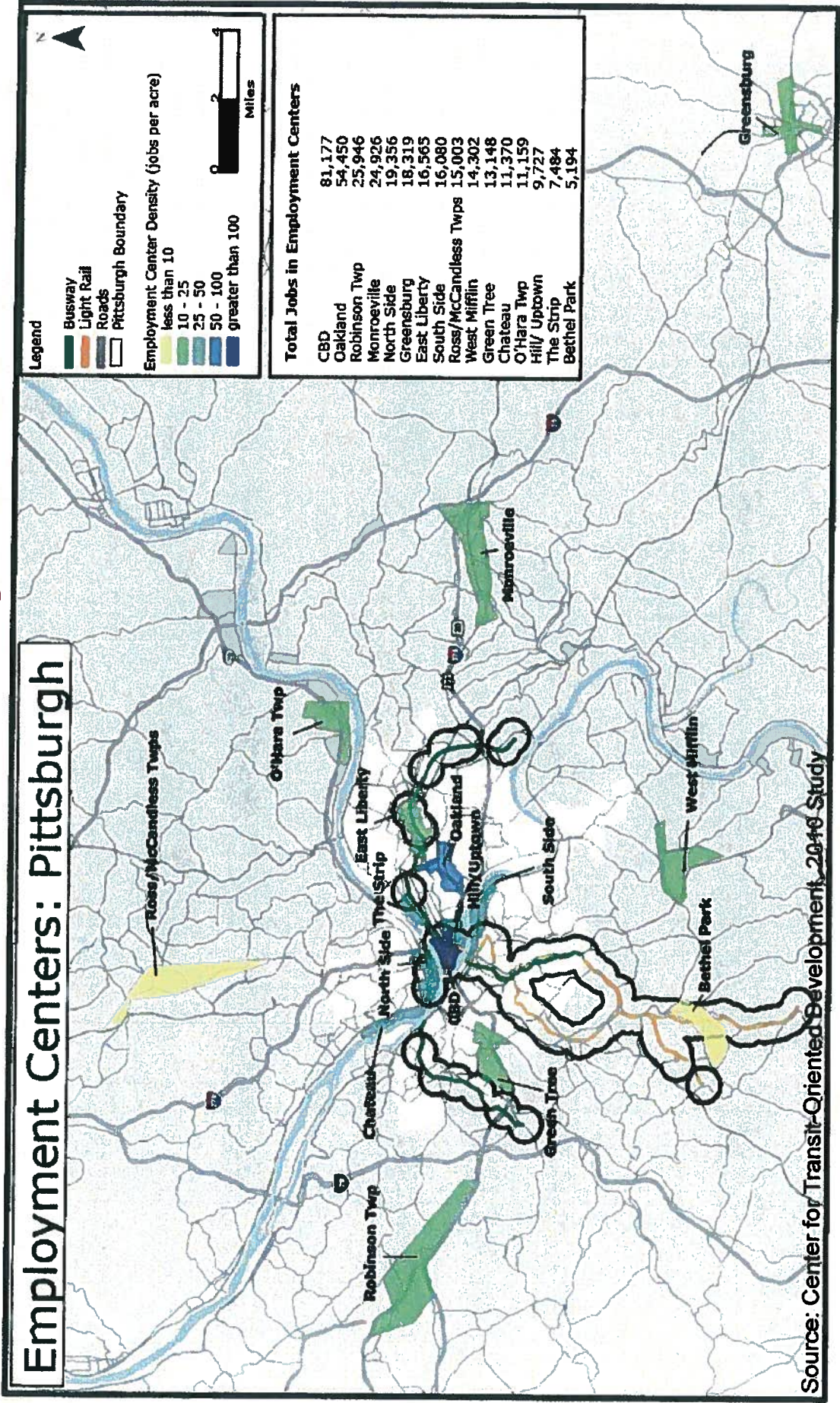
Rider Reduction: 55,000

Cost to taxpayers: \$420 million

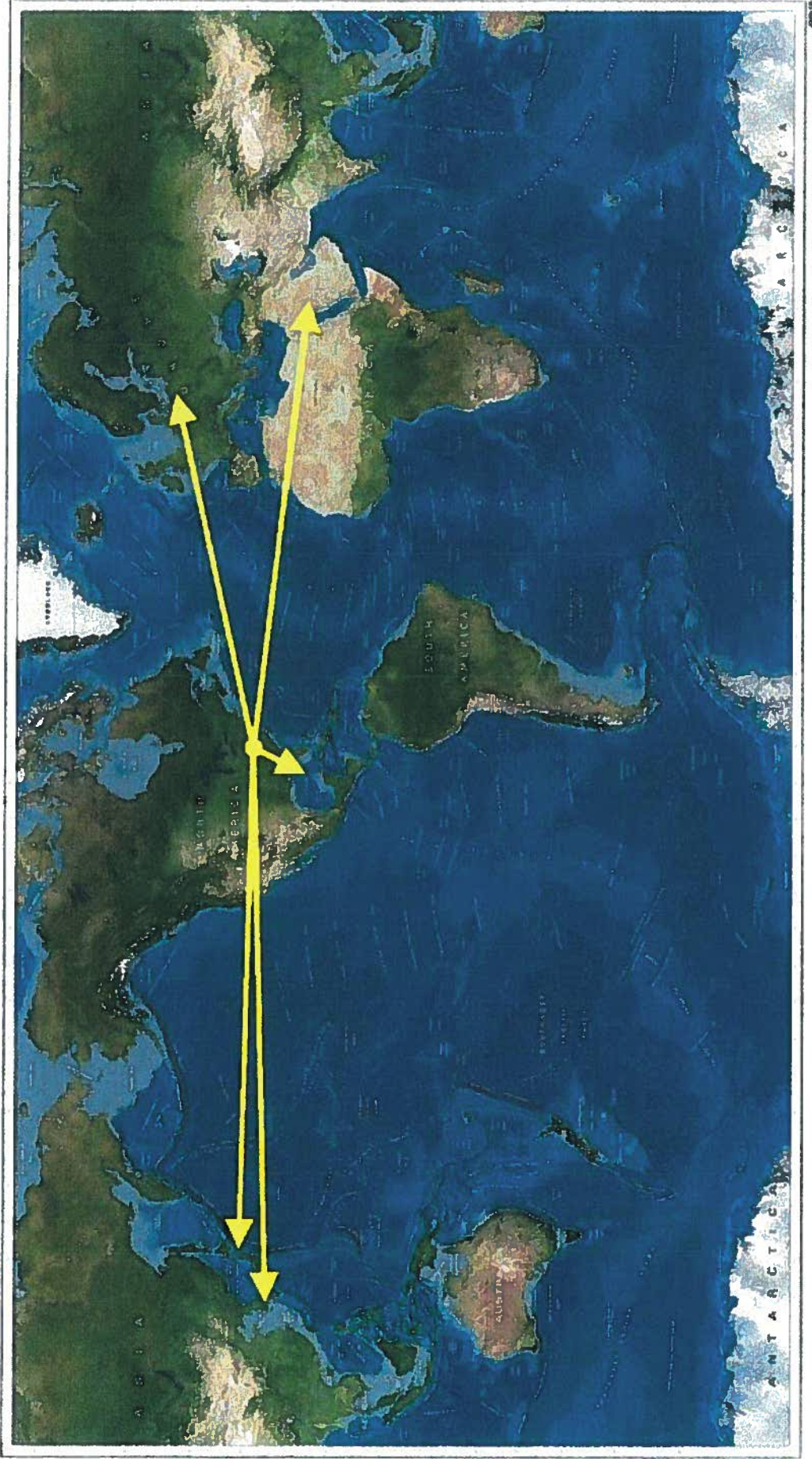
Question: who can afford an additional \$8,100/year in living costs?

Even in a household making \$100,00, that's an 8.1% **increase** in cost of living.

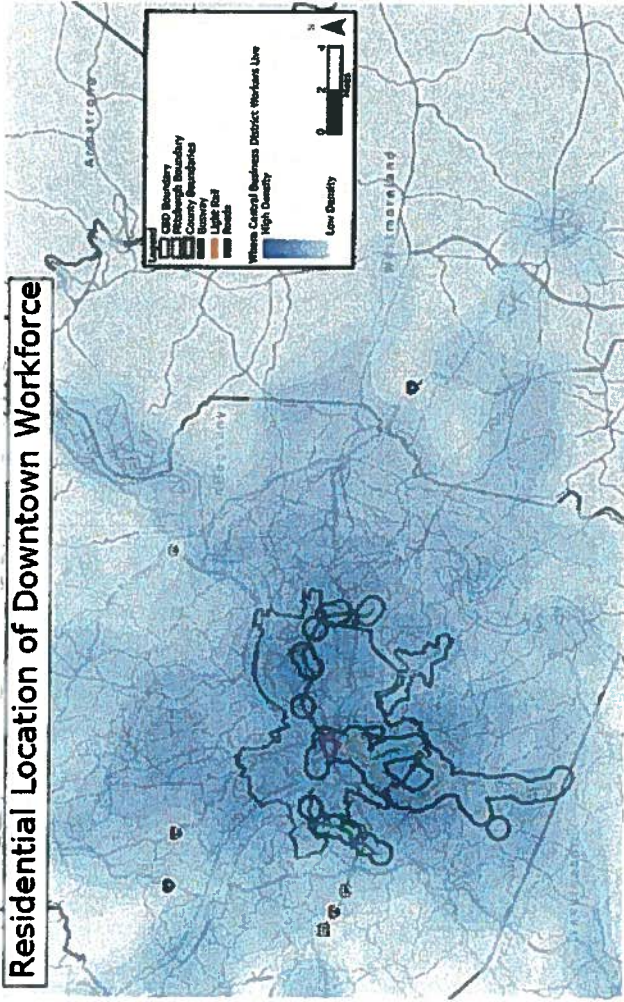
Downtown and Oakland have more jobs than all suburban centers combined. Without transit, will they stay in Pennsylvania??



**\$420 million more spent locally doesn't stay local –
it leaves the region and the country**

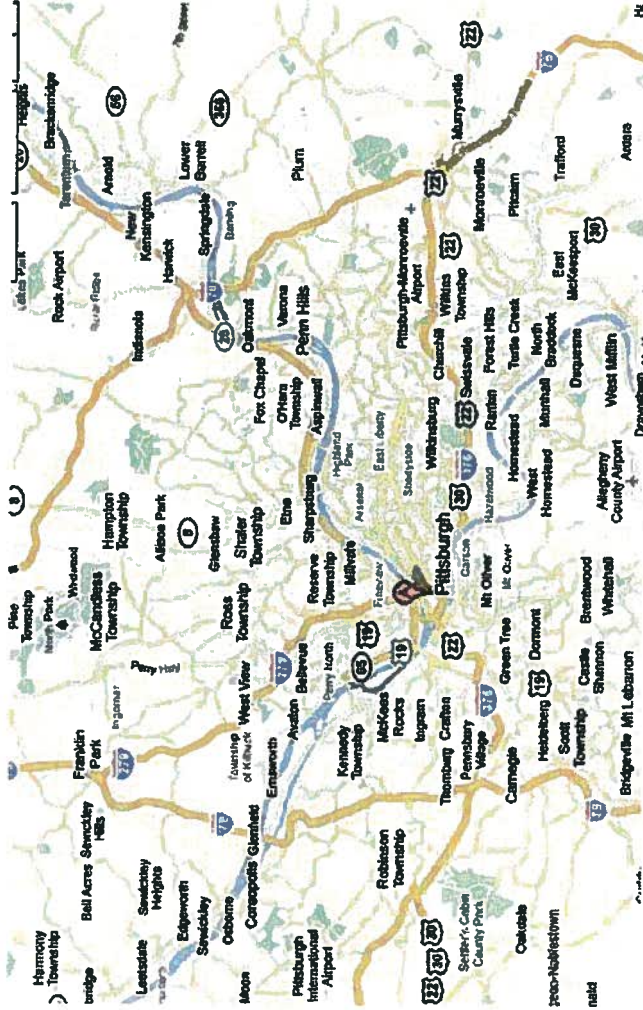


Residential Location of Downtown Workforce



**Jobs are in Downtown
and Oakland for a
reason**

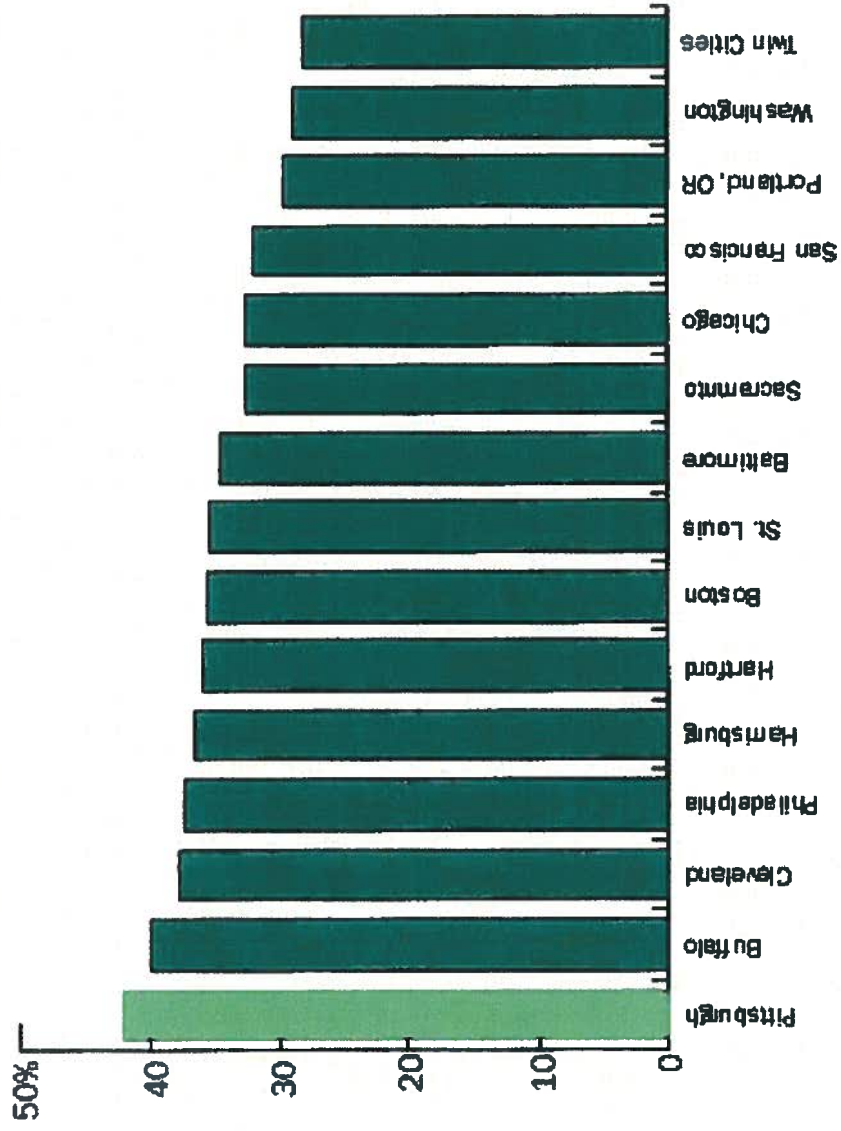
- Our transportation network leads into the city
- Most commuters will not cross town for work



Sources: Center for Transit-Oriented Development, 2010 Study; Google Maps

Pittsburgh is one of the nation's oldest cities...

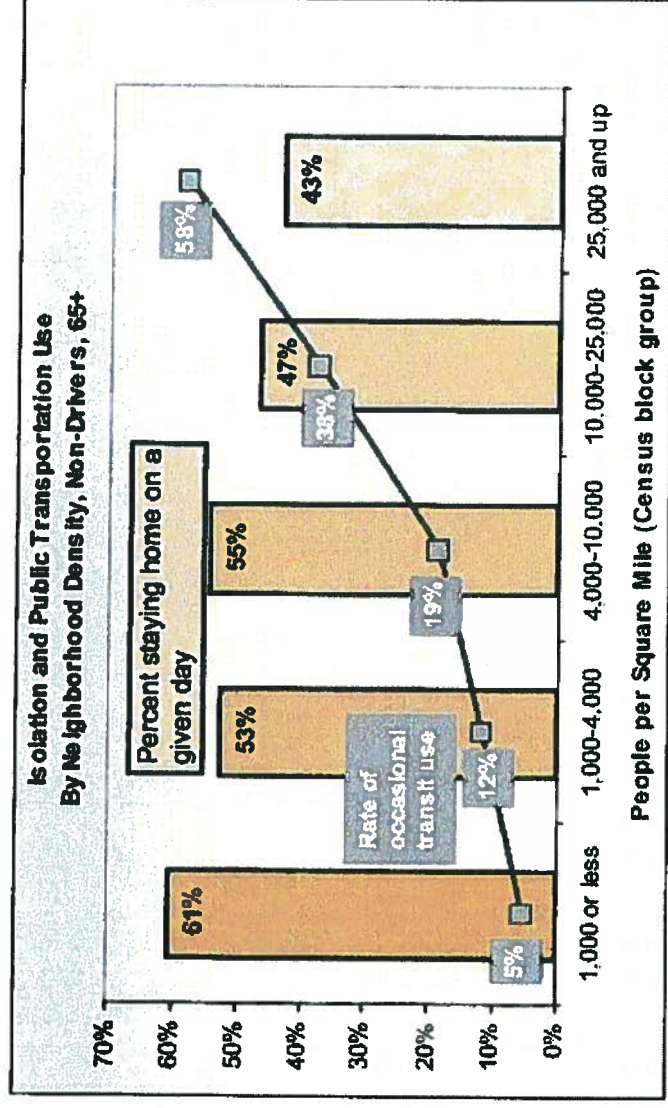
Percent of Households with Householders Over Age 55



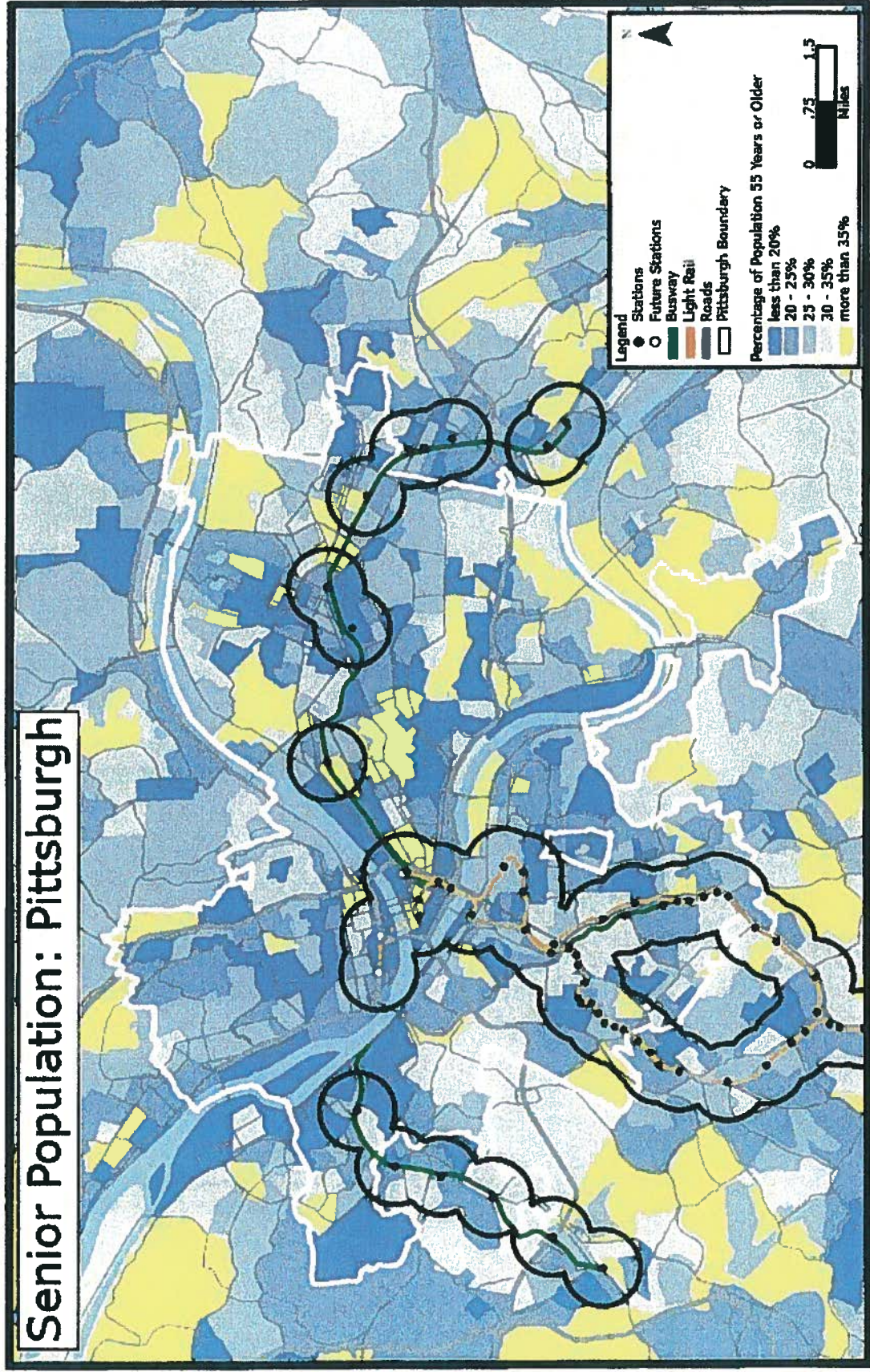
Almost HALF of Pittsburgh's households have residents over the age of 55, and that number is growing...

Compact communities and transit reduce isolation among non-driving residents

- In a 2005 AARP survey:
 - 25% of respondents gave their communities a D or F for offering amenities within walking distance
 - 1/3 of respondents said their communities fail to provide dependable public transportation
 - 71% of older households want to live within walking distance of transit



Pittsburgh's older households need to be connected to transit

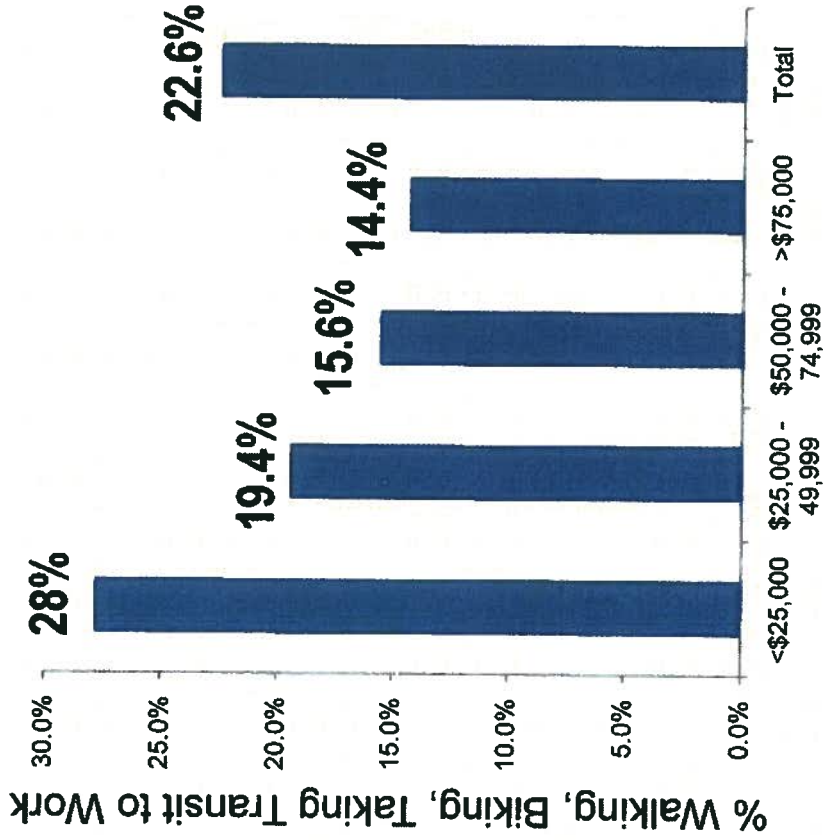


Source: Center for Transit-Oriented Development, 2010 Study

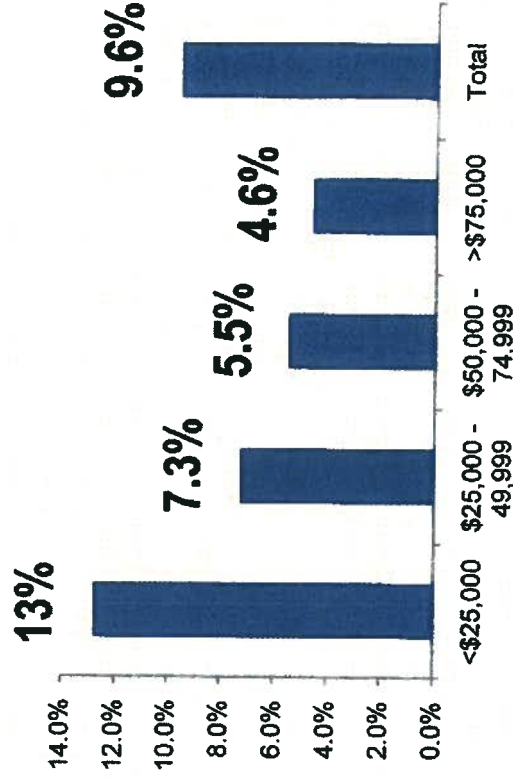
Pittsburgh's transit: it's for everyone

Rates of non-auto commutes are more than double among workers who live near transit, but transit affects everyone.

Pittsburgh Fixed Guideway Transit



Pittsburgh MSA



Thank you

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