

## Census Journey-to-Work

### What do we know about how Americans Travel?

The first set of transportation figures from the 2000 Census long form – known as the Journey to Work data – give us a glimpse of the travel behavior of people commuting to work. However, the data is limited and other surveys may present a more complete picture of travel behavior.

The figures show that the average time it took commuters to get to work was 25.5 minutes – up two minutes from 1990. They also show that, as more Americans moved to sprawling areas with fewer transportation choices, a greater share of commuters drove alone to work: up from 73.2 percent to 75.7 percent. Working at home, or telecommuting, made the largest gains in modal share, growing from 3.0 to 3.3 percent. Transit's share of commute trips declined by 11 percent over the last decade, from 5.3 percent to 4.7 percent. Walking to work and carpooling also posted declines, with walking dropping from 3.9 percent of work trips to 2.9 percent, and carpooling's share of work trips declining from 13.4 to 12.2 percent.

While data on bicycling to work is not yet available from the Decennial Census, results from a Census supplemental survey conducted in 2000 show bicycling's mode share growing 9 percent during the decade.

#### Why the Census Data Tells Only Part of the Story

The Census Journey to Work (JTW) data is by far the most comprehensive snapshot of commuting in the United States, but it has nothing to say about the 80 percent of trips that are for other purposes. The Census JTW data does not include information on shopping trips, school trips, or recreational trips. All Census data is for a single week in April, and relies on respondent judgments of travel time and other

	Share of Work Trips	
	1990	2000
Drive Alone	73.2%	75.7%
Carpool	13.4%	12.2%
Transit	5.3%	4.7%
Walk	3.9%	2.9%
Bicycle	0.41%	0.44%*
Work at Home	3.0%	3.3%

\*from the 2000 Census Supplementary Survey.

factors. In addition, because the Census asks respondents to indicate the mode of transportation they *usually* take to work, it fails to count people who took transit, bicycled, or walked to work occasionally. And, where people used more than one mode to get to work (i.e. walking to a transit station), only the mode that commuters estimated carried them most of the distance is counted.

#### Some Different Views

Several national-level data sources can provide some insight into what the Census is missing, and give an entirely different view of public transportation, bicycling and walking in the last decade.

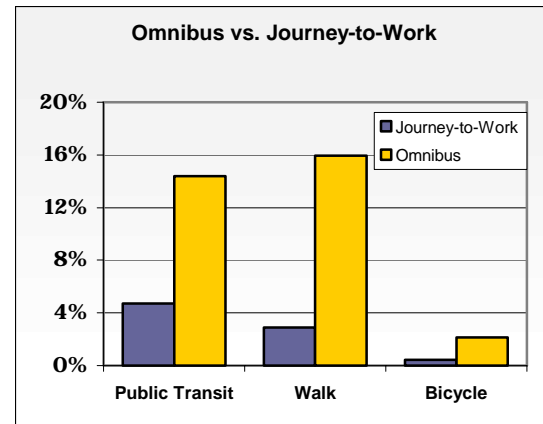
The Omnibus Household Survey, a nationwide monthly survey of 1,000 households conducted by the Bureau of Transportation Statistics, collects data on core questions about general travel experiences. The most recent release of the data, in May 2002, shows that when you look beyond work trips, many Americans use more than one way to get around. While the majority of Americans stick to the same mode day in and day out, almost 40 percent (37.4%) complement their typical means of travel with a differ-

ent mode: for example, driving for some trips while bicycling for others.

As mentioned above, the Census shows that less than 5 percent of commuters take transit as their usual mode to work. However, the Omnibus survey finds that 14 percent of all Americans reported using transit at least once for some type of trip in the past month. This figure is artificially low because many areas don't offer transit (see decoder #3); it climbs to 22 percent when only areas where transit is available are counted. This is considerably higher than the number of Americans who flew on a commercial airline in the past month – just 11 percent.

Other methods of getting around also show up when occasional and non-work trips are counted: two percent of Americans rode a bicycle to work or to do errands, and 16 percent walked to work or to do errands. While by no means an apples-to-apples comparison, the graph above is useful in illustrating the gaps in the Census JTW data.

The Census figures also fail to capture the most recent upward trend in total transit ridership, which counts transit trips for all purposes. According to the American



Public Transportation Association (APTA), ridership figures in 2000 reached their highest levels in over 40 years, only to be surpassed again in 2001. From 1996 through 2001, public transit experienced six consecutive years of strong ridership growth (22 percent total), a dramatic reversal of ridership declines earlier in the decade. APTA's ridership figures clearly show that transit is an increasingly important part of the American travel equation.

#### Sources

For transportation data from the 2000 Census, see STPP's website at [www.transact.org](http://www.transact.org)

For general 2000 Census data, go to [www.census.gov/main/www/cen2000.html](http://www.census.gov/main/www/cen2000.html)

The Census Supplementary Survey can be found at [www.census.gov/c2ss/www](http://www.census.gov/c2ss/www)

The Omnibus Household Survey can be found at [www.bts.gov/omnibus/household/index.html](http://www.bts.gov/omnibus/household/index.html)

For more on transit ridership see STPP's decoder, "Transit Growing Faster than Driving," at [www.transact.org/Reports/decoder/Transit\\_VMT.htm](http://www.transact.org/Reports/decoder/Transit_VMT.htm)

For further information, see:

<http://www.transact.org>

<http://www.tea3.org>