

# Who has the worst commute?

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Greg Hinz on Politics



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Commuting from minority areas, particularly African-American neighborhoods on the South and West sides and adjacent suburbs, takes considerably longer than the trip to and from work elsewhere in the Chicago metropolitan area.

That's the gist of a pair of new studies by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning that take a look at the daily commute and how much hassle is involved, based on American Community Survey data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

CMAP isolated certain minority areas that share common characteristics, such as race or ethnicity, income level and limited English proficiency, and compared them to non-minority areas and the rest of the region. In CMAP lingo, these are known as Economically Disconnected Area clusters.

What they found is that in the south Chicago cluster, generally the African-American South Side, the average one-way commute was 39 minutes, compared with 32 minutes for the region as a whole and under 30 minutes for many other areas. The commute also took longer than average on the West Side, at 35 minutes, and in the south suburbs, 33 minutes.

The data was prepared as part of CMAP's upcoming 2050 regional development plan.

So, what accounts for the difference?

Elizabeth Schuh, who heads the 2050 project, says it's a combination of transportation, education and other factors that give residents of the affected areas a tougher path to employment.

"Part of it is just lack of access to vehicles," Schuh said. That means people have to take public transportation, which may be convenient if your job is downtown, but requires a longer ride and often a transfer or two if your work is in Schaumburg, Joliet or northwest Indiana.

Another factor is a lack of jobs in minority areas themselves, requiring people to go farther for work, Schuh said. And the types of jobs that exist in Chicago's booming central business area require skills and education levels that many residents of Economically Disconnected Area clusters lack.

The longer commutes for minority people were better in one area: Waukegan. According to the study, the average trip to or from work there took 25 minutes. That's 14 minutes shorter each way—almost a half-hour a day—compared to the South Side of the city.

There's a lot of other stuff in the reports regarding mode of transportation, income and related matters. Take a look for yourself: