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Traveling Without a Car in Los Angeles: Mobility Challenges Faced by Carless and Car-Deficit Households



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Issue

Car ownership in the U.S. is linked with numerous positive economic outcomes such as gaining and maintaining employment, working additional hours, and earning higher wages (Brown, 2017). For Los Angeles residents, specifically, there are 12 times more jobs accessible within a one hour radius by car than by transit, according to LADOT's 2021 Annual Report.

Those who do not own a vehicle, or who do not have dependable access to one due to financial, health or age-related constraints, must find other ways to meet their daily transportation needs. Involuntarily carless households, for example, are notably less mobile than motorized households. These households take half as many trips, and these trips are also shorter in distance, longer in duration, and skewed toward transit, walking, and bicycling (Blumenberg et al., 2020, Mitra & Saphores, 2020). Car-deficit households where there are fewer cars than drivers also travel fewer miles, take less trips, and are more likely to use public transit than households with one or more vehicles per driver (Blumenberg et al. 2020).

This study aimed to answer where carless and car-deficit households are concentrated in the City of Los Angeles and understand what mobility challenges they face, how their transportation decision-making is impacted by the neighborhood they live in, and propose potential interventions to address their travel concerns. Findings from the study were used to provide the Los Angeles Department

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of Transportation (LADOT) with recommendations for improving the transportation system to better support carless and car-deficit households.

Study Approach

This study uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative data to identify where carless/car-deficit households are concentrated and better understand their unique mobility challenges. Using publicly available data from the 2020 U.S. Census, the researcher identified neighborhoods in Los Angeles with high concentrations of carless households. This analysis was then used to select one urban neighborhood and one suburban neighborhood with high rates of carless households — Westlake-MacArthur Park and Pacoima-Panorama City — to distribute surveys and solicit local opinions on transportation at community events. An online survey link was given to interested participants, and included questions about their local transportation experiences such as modes used, transportation challenges, and level of awareness of transportation projects and programs. During the study period, a total of 43 respondents completed the survey and were included in the final data analysis.

Key Findings

- In Los Angeles, the Westlake-MacArthur Park and Pacoima-Panorama City neighborhoods are both predominantly low-income communities of color with large concentrations of transit users and zero-car households (Figure 1).

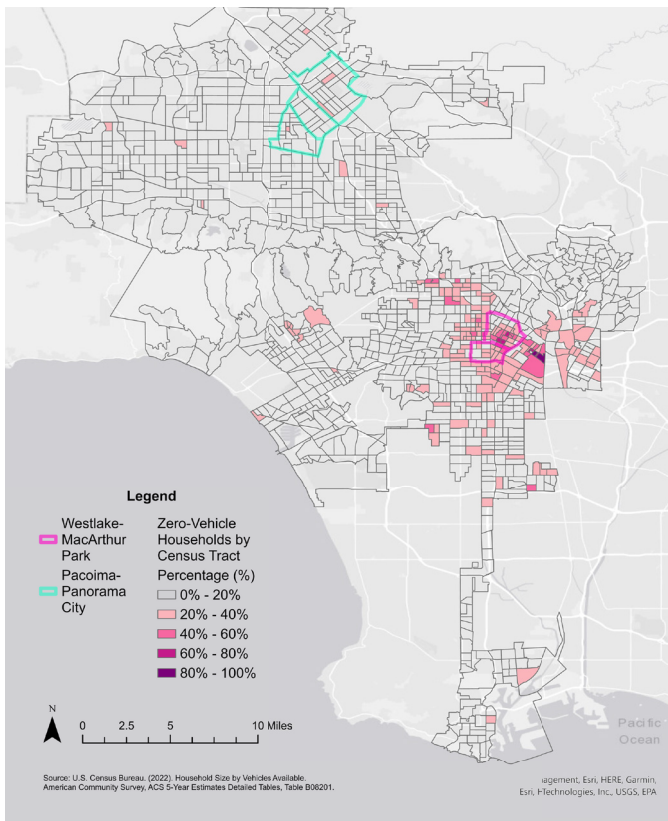


Figure 1. Percentage of Zero-Vehicle Households by Census Tract in Los Angeles

- Both neighborhoods shared similar concerns around the lack of pedestrian infrastructure such as sidewalks.
- Residents in both neighborhoods expressed concerns related to the extra time associated with traveling on public transit, including long wait times, living too far from a transit stop, and finding public transit to be generally unpredictable.
- Residents across both neighborhoods had low rates of participation in public programs that aim to alleviate the cost of transportation in Los Angeles, including the Metro LIFE fare discount program and LADOT’s BlueLA carsharing program for low-income residents.

Recommendations

This study provides insight into the landscape of transportation barriers that carless and car-deficit households face in Westlake-MacArthur Park and Pacoima-Panorama City. Moving forward, local agencies like LADOT should consider investing in interventions to improve mobility and access to opportunity for carless and car-deficit households. Further, findings from this study reveal a need for interventions that accomplish the following:

- While residents in Pacoima-Panorama City reported carpooling and riding the bus as their most used modes of transportation, residents of Westlake-MacArthur Park reported higher use of public transit such as bus and rail.
- Over half of all carless and car-deficit respondents shared that they have skipped and/or rescheduled trips to health care facilities, school, work, and other destinations due to transportation issues.
- Despite notable differences in travel patterns, residents of both neighborhoods expressed great concern about safety, especially at night, when walking and accessing public transit.

- Promote safe access to transit stops by improving nighttime visibility, provide safe transportation connections that address first/last-mile concerns, invest in community safety initiatives, address improvements to pedestrian infrastructure through sidewalk repairs, and protect transit riders from extreme weather through shaded bus shelters.
- Rethink safety on transit by investing in alternative modes of policing on transit, such as unarmed, non-law enforcement safety escorts.
- Expand universal auto access through subsidizing and expanding transportation services and programs.
- Continue public outreach efforts to increase awareness of public programs.



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