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Aligning Social Service Benefits and Transportation Access in Los Angeles County

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Author

De Santos Quezada, Veronica

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**Institute of
Transportation Studies**

Aligning Social Service Benefits and Transportation Access in Los Angeles County

Project Lead: Veronica De Santos Quezada

Faculty Advisor: Madeline Brozen

Client: UCLA Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies

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16. Abstract Transportation is often necessary for accessing food, medical care, income, and other essential services. This study examines how nine major benefit programs serving low-income households in Los Angeles County, including CalFresh, Medi-Cal, CalWORKs, and transportation-specific programs like Metro LIFE and Metrolink Mobility-4-All, currently support transportation access. Within each program, this analysis evaluates transportation support, enrollment accessibility, and opportunities for integrating transportation across benefit programs. The results show that seven of the nine programs offer some form of transportation benefit, but the level and nature of support for mobility needs vary widely. This analysis defines meaningful transportation access as the ability to use multiple modes of transportation and reach various types of destinations. While most programs offer some form of mobility assistance, these benefits are typically limited to a single mode or destination type, and therefore do not achieve comprehensive transportation access. Without this level of access, low-income individuals, in particular, are left with limited, and often inadequate, options for reaching essential services such as food, healthcare, or employment. This paper concludes with near- and long-term policy recommendations to improve coordination, enhance communication, and draw on other pilots that consolidate transportation benefits into a more coherent, accessible system. The findings highlight how aligning mobility with benefit delivery is essential for building an equitable and effective support system.			
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To every person navigating the challenges of meeting basic needs, confronting systemic injustices—past and present—and holding onto the hope of a fair and dignified life: meeting those needs is not a privilege, it is a human right.

To all parents who go without meals so their children can eat, and who cannot afford to miss a single day of work out of fear for their family's survival.

To all those who live in constant uncertainty, unsure if there will be food or shelter tomorrow.

A todas las personas que enfrentan el desafío de cubrir sus necesidades básicas, que resisten las injusticias sistémicas —pasadas y presentes— y que mantienen la esperanza de una vida justa y digna: satisfacer esas necesidades no es un privilegio, es un derecho humano.

A todas las madres, padres y personas cuidadoras que se quedan sin comer para que sus hijos puedan alimentarse, y que no pueden permitirse faltar un solo día al trabajo por temor a poner en riesgo el sustento de su familia.

A todas las personas que viven en constante incertidumbre, sin saber si mañana tendrán comida o un techo donde dormir.

The Institute of Transportation Studies at UCLA acknowledges the Gabrielino/Tongva peoples as the traditional land caretakers of Tovaangar (the Los Angeles basin and So. Channel Islands). As a land grant institution, we pay our respects to the Honuukvetam (Ancestors), 'Ahihirom (Elders) and 'Eyoohiinkem (our relatives/relations) past, present and emerging.

Disclaimer

This report was prepared in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master in Urban and Regional Planning degree in the Department of Urban Planning at the University of California, Los Angeles. It was prepared at the direction of the UCLA Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies as a planning client. The views expressed herein are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Department, the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs, UCLA as a whole, or the client.

Aligning Social Service Benefits and Transportation Access in Los Angeles County

UCLA Institute of Transportation Studies

A comprehensive project submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree
Master of Urban and Regional Planning.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	5
Introduction	6
Approach	8
Findings	10
Program Eligibility Criteria and Program Accessibility	10
Transportation Linkages and Support Evaluation	13
Overlap and Missed Integration Opportunities	15
Case Study	16
Policy Recommendations	17
Conclusion	19
References	20

List of Tables and Figures

Table 1. Program Summary by Eligibility and Enrollment Method	12
Figure 1. Transportation Support Matrix by Program	13
Table 2. Transportation Access	15

Executive Summary

Transportation is often necessary for accessing food, medical care, income, and other essential services. This study examines how nine major benefit programs serving low-income households in Los Angeles County, including CalFresh, Medi-Cal, CalWORKs, and transportation-specific programs like Metro LIFE and Metrolink Mobility-4-All, currently support transportation access. Within each program, this analysis evaluates transportation support, enrollment accessibility, and opportunities for integrating transportation across benefit programs. The results show that seven of the nine programs offer some form of transportation benefit, but the level and nature of support for mobility needs vary widely. This analysis defines meaningful transportation access as the ability to use multiple modes of transportation and reach various types of destinations. While most programs offer some form of mobility assistance, these benefits are typically limited to a single mode or destination type, and therefore do not achieve comprehensive transportation access. Without this level of access, low-income individuals, in particular, are left with limited, and often inadequate, options for reaching essential services such as food, healthcare, or employment. This paper concludes with near- and long-term policy recommendations to improve coordination, enhance communication, and draw on other pilots that consolidate transportation benefits into a more coherent, accessible system. The findings highlight how aligning mobility with benefit delivery is essential for building an equitable and effective support system.

Introduction

Social service programs support low-income families in meeting basic needs such as food, health care, income assistance, and housing. In Los Angeles County, CalFresh alone served 964,411 households in FY 2022–23, with enrollment projected to exceed 1 million households in FY 2023–24 (County of Los Angeles, 2023). These programs provide essential support, but financial assistance alone may not be sufficient to ensure that families can consistently meet their basic needs.

A fundamental factor influencing program access is the ability to physically reach service locations. For many low-income individuals in Los Angeles County, public transportation is not merely a convenience, it is a necessity. Transit-dependent riders, who typically come from very low-income households and lack access to a private vehicle, make up the majority of transit users (Schouten, Taylor, & Blumenberg, 2021). This reliance on public transit highlights the need for more intentional integration of transportation into the structure of social support programs. Yet, within the county's network of social service programs, transportation is often overlooked, inconsistently delivered, or isolated from other essential benefits. This paper centers mobility as a core determinant of access, arguing that without reliable, affordable transportation, services cannot fully meet their intended purpose.

Decades of research have documented the critical link between mobility and access to opportunity. Evelyn Blumenberg and Paul Ong (2001) found that welfare recipients in Los Angeles face significant variation in employment access depending on their neighborhood and commute mode. In job-poor areas, limited or unreliable public transit often places employment out of reach. Similarly, Cervero, Sandoval, and Landis (2002) showed that car access, more than transit quality, increased the odds of transitioning from welfare to work in Alameda County. Blumenberg (2002) further noted that mismatches in institutional priorities between social services and transportation agencies often prevent coordinated planning efforts, limiting the effectiveness of mobility-related solutions and leaving equity gaps unaddressed.

This paper builds on that foundation with new data and local context. It presents a comparative analysis of nine major public benefit programs in Los Angeles County including CalFresh, Medi-Cal, CalWORKs, WIC (Women, Infants, and Children), General Relief, Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and transportation-specific initiatives like Metro Low-Income Fare Assistance (LIFE), Metrolink Mobility-4-All, and Lime (shared scooter) Access. These programs serve overlapping populations, but they operate independently, each with its own application process, eligibility verification, and transportation linkage (if any). Many individuals qualify for multiple services but must navigate each one separately.

The goal of this paper is to understand how transportation access is currently addressed across benefit programs and what can be done to better integrate mobility into the network of social support. A unified scoring framework was developed to assess each program based on three key dimensions: transportation support (including type and extent of assistance), accessibility

(application methods and language access), and opportunities for integration (including cross-program eligibility and auto-enrollment).

By focusing on the user experience rather than agency structure, this research highlights how current systems may unintentionally create barriers for those most in need. As Wachs and Taylor (1998) argued, "transportation cannot eliminate poverty, but it can help eliminate the mobility barriers that entrench it."

This paper is grounded in the conviction that mobility should be viewed not as an optional add-on, but as a fundamental component of equitable social service delivery. The following sections present findings from this comparative analysis, a case study illustrating the experience of a typical program user, and policy recommendations to reduce fragmentation, improve benefit visibility, and propose a pilot innovative solution. These insights aim to inform collaboration between agencies like Metro and Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) and strengthen Los Angeles County's efforts toward integrated, person-centered service delivery.

Approach

This study conducted a structured inventory and evaluation of nine major programs targeting low-income individuals and households to better understand how transportation support is (or is not) included within social service programs in Los Angeles County. These programs support a wide range of public needs, including food access, health care, energy support, income assistance, and transportation subsidies. These programs provide different types of assistance but all serve low-income populations. The programs reviewed include:

- CalFresh
- CalWORKs
- General Relief
- Medi-Cal
- WIC (Women, Infants, and Children)
- Metro LIFE Program (Public transit discount)
- Metrolink Discount Program (Mobility-4-All)
- Lime Access
- Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)

Programs were selected based on their prominence and relevance within Los Angeles County. While not exhaustive, this sample captures a broad spectrum of basic needs and includes programs most widely used or most relevant to transportation access. Selection criteria involved public visibility, household reach, and the likelihood of including or requiring travel for services, allowing for a comparative analysis of how transportation access is addressed across these systems.

Each program is described and evaluated using a set of standardized criteria:

- Benefit type
- Eligibility requirements
- Gross annual income limit for a one-person household
- Enrollment process and method of access
- Transportation linkage (whether transportation is part of the benefit)
- Transportation support level (how well transportation supports an individual)
- Accessibility (ease of enrollment, language access, online/in-person availability)
- Opportunities for integration (connections to or auto-enrollment from other programs)
- Geographic service area
- Programmatic overlap (already mentions other programs)

Informed by the literature on collaborative planning and transportation equity (Blumenberg, 2002; Wachs & Taylor, 1997), this methodology emphasizes not only the presence of transportation benefits but also the degree of administrative burden faced by users. Transportation support, accessibility, and opportunities for integration, three core indicators, were scored across all programs using qualitative definitions adapted from past UCLA planning research and public policy evaluation standards.

Transportation support was scored based on the number of transportation modes offered, the range of destinations covered, and whether the support is clearly advertised as part of the program. Four scores were given based on this evaluation:

- None: No transportation benefit offered.
- Low: One mode or destination type; not widely known or accessible.
- Medium: One transportation benefit that is reasonably visible and usable.
- High: Multiple modes and destinations, with strong public awareness.

Accessibility was evaluated based on ease of enrollment, language access, online/in-person availability: Three scores were given based on this evaluation:

- Low: Difficult to navigate; only one enrollment channel (e.g., in-person only).
- Medium: Two access options with clear instructions.
- High: Three or more access options and user-friendly instructions.

Opportunities for integration assessed whether programs were linked with others or shared eligibility. Four scores were given based on this evaluation:

- None: No integration or alignment with other benefits.
- Low: One eligibility alignment.
- Medium: Two eligibility alignment or shared intake references.
- High: Multiple eligibility alignment or clear references to other program qualifications (e.g., “if you receive CalFresh, you qualify”).

Program overlap was further documented. For example, the Metrolink Mobility-4-All program requires proof of CalFresh enrollment as part of its eligibility criteria, while WIC cross-references Medi-Cal, CalWORKs, and CalFresh to serve as alternatives to income documentation. These overlaps signal potential for streamlined enrollment systems or integrated application platforms.

This inventory provides a clearer understanding of where transportation support is embedded within social service programs and where gaps remain. It also provides the foundation for identifying where administrative and policy interventions can improve integration, reduce duplication, and expand mobility for recipients.

The following section presents findings from this comparative analysis, highlighting patterns of transportation support, transportation access, and the potential for more integrated benefit coordination across Los Angeles County.

Findings

This section summarizes findings from a comparative analysis of nine major social service programs in Los Angeles County. This analysis finds that while these programs serve overlapping low-income populations, only four explicitly include transportation-related support.

Many programs share income thresholds or accept enrollment in other benefits as proof of eligibility, for example, LIFE, Metrolink Mobility-4-All, and Lime Access all accept CalFresh participation. However, these acknowledgments do not translate into streamlined processes. Each program has a separate application, requiring individuals to re-submit the same documentation and re-prove eligibility across platforms. This lack of integration duplicates efforts, delays access to benefits, and creates unnecessary administrative hurdles. For low-income individuals already balancing multiple obligations, the burden of repeatedly navigating disconnected systems can prevent them from receiving the full range of support they qualify to receive. These gaps in coordination, particularly in transportation support, highlight institutional barriers that continue to limit equitable access to essential services.

Program Eligibility Criteria and Program Accessibility

Eligibility criteria across the nine programs demonstrate alignment and divergence. Most require California residency, proof of low or no income, and documentation of identity. However, beyond these baseline standards, programs differ widely in their specific requirements and target populations. WIC, for example, targets pregnant individuals and households with children under age five, while CalWORKs requires the presence of a dependent and participation in work-related activities. In contrast, General Relief applies to adults who do not qualify for other cash assistance programs and enforces stricter asset limits.

Transportation-related programs like Metro LIFE, Metrolink Mobility-4-All, and Lime Access allow applicants to demonstrate eligibility through enrollment in other programs such as CalFresh or Medi-Cal, rather than requiring separate income documentation. In contrast, other programs reviewed, such as CalFresh, Medi-Cal, and CalWORKs, require formal income verification, typically in the form of recent pay stubs, tax returns, or benefit statements.

Table 1 presents a summary of each program's administering agency, benefit type, eligibility requirements, income thresholds, and enrollment methods. While most programs follow a countywide application process, LIHEAP stands out for its geographic fragmentation. Depending on where an applicant resides in Los Angeles County, they must apply through one of several different administering agencies, each with its own website, forms, and procedures, making the process confusing and difficult to navigate. Additionally, LIHEAP does not provide ongoing utility support to low-income households; it only provides financial assistance to households that are behind on their bills and at risk of utility shut-off. Due to this barrier and the absence of transportation-related support, LIHEAP was excluded from the rest of the analysis.

Programs like CalFresh and Medi-Cal stand out for their flexibility, offering online, in-person, and mail-based enrollment options, along with multilingual support. In contrast, programs such as WIC and Metrolink's Mobility-4-All require in-person enrollment that may present challenges for individuals with limited time, mobility constraints, or difficulty accessing fixed enrollment locations. In WIC's case, the in-person enrollment process is tied to its mission of verifying nutritional risk and household eligibility for pregnant individuals or families with young children, an administrative step that may be necessary, though still challenging. Transit-specific programs also vary in their accessibility: Metro LIFE allows for multiple enrollment channels, whereas Lime Access offers only an online application, which may exclude individuals without reliable internet or digital access.

Table 1. Program Summary by Eligibility and Enrollment Method

Program	Administering Agency	Benefit Type	Eligibility Criteria	1-Person Household Max Gross Annual Income	Enrollment Process
CalFresh	California Department of Social Services (CDSS)	Food assistance	Proof of low-income or no income; proof of identity; limited property; U.S. citizen or legal resident; immigrant meeting certain criteria	\$19,584 / (\$1,632 monthly)	Online, by phone, or in person
CalWORKs	California Department of Social Services (CDSS)	Cash assistance	Proof of low-income or no income; California residency; relationship status; have a child under 18; proof of identity; limited property; U.S. citizen or legal resident; immigration status	Not fixed, based on Minimum Basic Standard of Adequate Care level	Online, by phone, or in person
General Relief	County of Los Angeles Department of Public Social Services	Cash assistance	Resident of Los Angeles County; asset limits; real property under \$34,000	\$2,652	In person, by mail, fax, online, or phone
Medi-Cal	California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS)	Health care	Proof of low-income or no income	\$21,597	In person, by mail, phone, or online
WIC (Women, Infants, and Children)	U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)	Food assistance	Pregnant or recently gave birth; have or care for child under 5; low-to-medium income or enrolled in Medi-Cal, CalWORKs, or CalFresh; reside in California	\$28,953	In person
Lime Access	Lime	Discount program	Proof of enrollment in public benefits (e.g., SNAP, Medicaid, WIC, etc.); name, email, birthdate, phone number; eligibility reasons must be stated	N/A	Online
LIFE Program (Metro)	Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority	Fare discount program	Proof of low-income or enrollment in CalFresh, Medi-Cal, reduced lunch, SNAP, Social Security, SSDI, or TANF	\$48,550	Online, at Metro Customer Centers, partner locations, or via community events.
Metrolink Discount Program Mobility-4-AI Program	Metrolink	Fare discount program	Must possess valid CalFresh (EBT) card issued by California	\$19,584	Purchase tickets at Metrolink station ticket machines

Source: Compiled by the author from official program websites, including the California Department of Social Services, Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services, California Department of Health Care Services, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, and Lime. Accessed March–June 2025.

Transportation Linkages and Support Evaluation

Transportation-related benefits are unevenly distributed across programs. Although several programs serve residents who likely have significant transportation needs given their low incomes, only a subset of them explicitly provide mobility-related assistance, and those that do vary widely in the modes supported and the types of destinations covered.

This analysis defines meaningful transportation support as the ability to use multiple transportation modes to reach a range of essential destinations. Without this level of access, individuals face constrained and often inadequate mobility options that can prevent them from obtaining basic services like health care, employment, or food.

As shown in **Figure 1**, each program is plotted based on the number of transportation modes it supports (e.g., transit, mileage reimbursement, bike access) and the variety of destination types it enables access to (e.g., healthcare, employment, or food). Programs like CalFresh, which offer no transportation support, appear in the bottom-left quadrant. In contrast, CalWORKs demonstrates stronger support by offering access to multiple modes and destination types. Medi-Cal and WIC at (1,1), reflect limited transportation aid tied to specific destinations such as medical or clinic visits. The transit discount programs, Metro LIFE, Metrolink Mobility-4-All, and Lime Access, are positioned at (1,3+), indicating broader destination flexibility through a single mode.

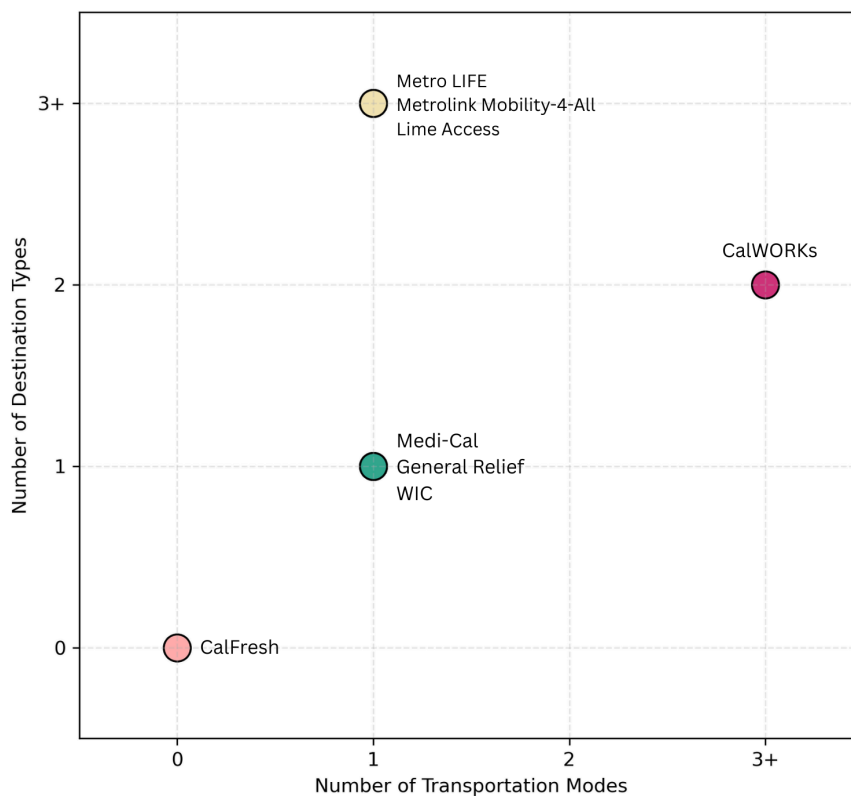


Figure 1. Transportation Support Matrix by Program

Among the programs reviewed, CalWORKs offers support to most types of transportation modes, including reimbursement for public transit, private vehicle mileage, and limited taxi fares. However, assistance for these modes is limited to employment activities alone. Medi-Cal provides non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT) which is a point-to-point service using vans or ridehailing services. This assistance must be arranged in advance and only supports medical-related trips. General Relief supports limited travel for employment purposes, but does not clearly define eligible modes or trip types. CalFresh offers no transportation support, and WIC provides assistance only in select rural areas, and only for clinic-related visits.

Transit discount programs such as Metro LIFE, Metrolink Mobility-4-All, and Lime Access offer fare subsidies but function separately from the broader benefit system. While each program enables travel to a wide range of destinations, they do so through only one primary mode, transit or micromobility, limiting flexibility for users with diverse mobility needs. The Metro LIFE program provides 20 free rides per month on Metro or participating regional transit services, with all rides free for the first 90 days and unused rides rolling over month to month. It also permits applicants to self-attest their income or qualify based on enrollment in other assistance programs. Metrolink Mobility-4-All offers a 50% discount on commuter rail fares, while Lime Access provides a 95% discount on pedal bikes and 50% off e-bikes and scooters. However, all three programs require separate applications. While some reduce documentation requirements, the absence of integration with other benefit systems still introduces administrative burdens, particularly for individuals already managing multiple applications across programs.

These programs are valuable, but their delivery formats and limited integration make them harder to use consistently. **Table 2**, Transportation Access, summarizes each program's level of mobility support and enrollment accessibility. It highlights the variability in transportation benefits, ranging from no support to comprehensive multi-modal access, and notes how ease of application differs across in-person, online, and phone-based methods.

Table 2. Transportation Access

Program Name	Transportation Support	Accessibility
CalFresh	None (Does not offer transportation assistance)	High (Available online, in person, and by phone.)
CalWORKs	High (Offers public transit, mileage reimbursement, and limited taxi fare for employment, childcare, or travel tied to CalWORKs participation.)	High (Available online, in person, and by phone.)
General Relief	Medium (Offers transportation for job search and medical appointments. No support after employment is secured.)	Medium (Available online and in person. Phone requests require a mailed application.)
Medi-Cal	Medium (Provides transportation only for medical services. Access may be difficult due to authorization requirements.)	High (Available online, in person, and by phone.)
WIC	Low (Provides transportation only for WIC appointments in designated rural areas.)	Medium (Available in person only. No online or phone enrollment.)
Lime Access	High (Provides significant fare discounts on scooters and bikes for low-income users.)	Medium (Only available through an online application.)
Metro LIFE Program	High (Provides fare discounts for multiple transit agencies across LA County.)	High (Available online and at various physical locations.)
Metrolink Mobility-4-All	High (Provides fare discounts on Metrolink. Requires in-person purchase with CalFresh EBT card.)	Medium (Requires in-person purchase each time. No remote enrollment.)

Overlap and Missed Integration Opportunities

Across the nine programs reviewed, eligibility frequently overlaps. Many recognize enrollment in other benefits as a qualifier, for example, Metro LIFE, Metrolink Mobility-4-All, and Lime Access allow proof of CalFresh participation for enrollment. However, no system automatically transfers this information or pre-qualifies users across platforms. Although the programs have similar eligibility requirements, the systems remain disconnected, forcing individuals to complete separate applications and prove the same information multiple times.

Ultimately, these findings point to a missed opportunity for coordinated service delivery. Embedding transportation access as a core component of social service design, rather than making it an individual's responsibility, Los Angeles County could better support the mobility and stability of its most vulnerable residents. Integrated systems are then not only more efficient; they are more equitable.

Case Study

Consider a 26-year-old Los Angeles County resident earning approximately \$23,400 annually. This income qualifies them for multiple programs, including CalFresh, Medi-Cal, Metro LIFE, Metrolink Mobility-4-All, and Lime Access. They may also be eligible for CalWORKs, if caring for a child, or WIC, if pregnant or parenting a child under five.

Despite meeting eligibility thresholds, this individual must complete separate applications with distinct platforms, documentation, and verification processes. While CalFresh and Medi-Cal can be accessed through the BenefitsCal portal, programs like WIC, LIFE, Metrolink, and Lime Access require separate intake processes, often involving in-person appointments or online forms not optimized for mobile access.

In terms of transportation, here is what they would receive:

- **CalWORKs** (*if applicable*): Reimbursement for transit, mileage, or limited taxi fares related to job training or employment.
- **Metro LIFE**: 20 free transit rides per month used across multiple transit agencies.
- **Metrolink Mobility-4-All**: 50% discount on Metrolink fares, but only with in-person EBT verification at the time of purchase.
- **Lime Access**: 50% discount on Lime e-scooters and e-bikes, and 95% discount on pedal bikes, but requires an online-only application with a valid benefits program ID.
- **Medi-Cal**: Transportation to and from medical appointments, with advanced reservation.
- **WIC** (*if applicable*): Only available to recipients living in rural areas, including select communities in the Santa Monica Mountains and the Antelope Valley.

These benefits collectively support travel to medical appointments, employment sites, and some general-purpose destinations. However, their usefulness depends on the individual's ability to access and manage each program independently. For example, Lime discounts are only useful if nearby destinations exist and the user feels safe using micromobility. Medi-Cal transportation supports travel to covered medical appointments, but must be arranged in advance. CalWORKs is only available to participants with children who are engaged in work-related activities.

At the same time, important gaps remain. Transportation assistance, beyond transit discounts, is not included for common needs like grocery shopping, which can be logistically difficult without a car. Similarly, travel for social, familial, or recreational purposes is not directly supported, aside from what may be accommodated through general-purpose transit. These limitations reduce the ability of individuals to fully benefit from available programs.

Moreover, each benefit requires separate enrollment and ongoing eligibility verification. A missed renewal notice, difficulty submitting documentation, or confusion about where to apply can result in dropped benefits even if the person remains eligible. This case illustrates how mobility is offered in theory, but often inaccessible in practice, particularly when each step demands time, stability, and digital access that low-income workers often lack.

Policy Recommendations

This study identifies opportunities for both immediate improvements and structural reforms to better align transportation access with the social service infrastructure in Los Angeles County. The goal is to reduce administrative burden, improve access to mobility across benefit programs, and design integrated systems that reflect the needs of low-income residents. The following recommendations are divided into near-term solutions that can improve existing programs and long-term strategies that reimagine the role of mobility in service delivery.

Near Term Recommendations

Improve Benefit Visibility and Communication

Many recipients are unaware that they qualify for transportation assistance. In the short term, Los Angeles County agencies, including DPSS and Metro, should prioritize clear, consistent outreach about available programs and eligibility criteria. This includes:

- Printed one-pagers or resource sheets that caseworkers, eligibility staff, and clinic personnel can distribute directly to clients.
- Translated outreach materials and signage in high-traffic locations such as DPSS offices, food distribution sites, and medical clinics to expand awareness.

Equip Staff with Mobility Benefit Information

Caseworkers may avoid discussing transportation benefits due to their complexity or prior negative experiences with approval processes. To address this, agencies should:

- Provide training modules or fact sheets for DPSS caseworkers, community health workers, and nonprofit staff.
- Develop checklists that encourage staff to review transportation options as part of the benefits intake or renewal conversation.
- Partner with trusted community organizations to deliver presentations or briefings on transportation options for their clients.

Long Term Recommendations

Establish a Countywide Mobility Wallet for Social Service Recipients

- Los Angeles County can build on LA Metro's 2023 Mobility Wallet Pilot Program, based in South LA, which provided \$150/month for one year for multimodal transportation, including transit, rideshare, bikeshare, and car rentals, to low-income participants. A countywide Mobility Wallet would enable recipients to access a broader range of destinations across multiple modes using a single, integrated system, improving on current programs' limited coverage. If plotted on Figure 1, this approach would provide support for multiple modes (3+) across multiple destinations (3+) .
- Consider tiering the amount of mobility subsidy to reflect need. For example, CalFresh recipients may receive \$150 in monthly mobility credits to support travel for grocery shopping, while CalWORKs recipients, who must regularly travel to job sites, workforce

programs, or child care, may qualify for \$250 to reflect their higher mobility needs. A person enrolled in both would receive the higher credit amount, not duplicated balances. This shared system would lower programmatic costs by eliminating duplicative transportation benefit structures across agencies. It would also simplify delivery by enabling recipients to access transportation support through one unified platform rather than multiple applications. Finally, it would expand flexibility by allowing participants to choose the mode that best fits their daily travel needs.

Formalize Interagency Collaboration Between Metro and DPSS

A successful mobility wallet model requires deep collaboration. DPSS brings the eligibility data, while Metro has the infrastructure and procurement capacity. An interagency Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) could establish roles, shared responsibilities, data sharing policies and a governance structure for administering mobility benefits across programs. Such a partnership would also reduce duplication and streamline future benefit integration.

Expand the Definition of Transportation Access Within Benefit Programs

Transportation should not be treated as a secondary service. Programs like CalFresh, Medi-Cal, and WIC can update internal guidance to acknowledge mobility as a prerequisite to access food, healthcare, and income support. Funding allocations for transportation should reflect this baseline need, rather than being narrowly defined or excluded.

Pursue State or Federal Funding to Support Integration

Los Angeles County agencies can seek pilot funding through state and federal grants to test a mobility wallet or unified application system. Potential funding sources include California Air Resources Board's Sustainable Transportation Equity Project (STEP) and the Clean Mobility Options Voucher Program, with additional technical support available through the California Integrated Travel Project (Cal-ITP). These funding programs are designed to support interagency and tech-enabled coordination.

Los Angeles County has the opportunity to lead a new model of integrated benefit delivery that recognizes transportation as foundational to public service access. Integrating transportation support will lead agencies to reduce inefficiencies, create access to basic needs, and better meet the interconnected needs of the residents they serve.

Conclusion

Transportation is not a peripheral issue, it is a necessary component for accessing food, medical care, income, and other essential services. This study shows that while Los Angeles County offers a broad network of benefit programs, transportation access is addressed inconsistently and difficult to navigate. Programs operate independently, leaving individuals responsible for managing transportation options together without consistent guidance or integrated support.

As the case study illustrates, even individuals who technically qualify for multiple transportation benefits may be unable to access them due to complicated enrollment processes, limited application formats, or inconsistent information. These gaps are not just technical, they reflect a disconnect between service intent and service delivery.

Los Angeles County has an opportunity to lead with innovation and compassion. Strengthening communication across agencies, making eligibility clearer, and developing shared tools such as a countywide Mobility Wallet can reduce administrative burden and expand mobility across transportation modes and destinations. A person-centered framework built around how residents live, move, and access care can replace the current fragmented approach with a system that is more coherent, more inclusive, and ultimately, more effective.

Mobility and social services must work together. When public systems recognize mobility as essential to accessing support, more people can move through the region, and their lives, with stability and dignity. A coordinated approach grounded in the realities of how people live and travel can transform service delivery into something more responsive, equitable, and effective.

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