

GULF COAST ACTION NETWORK

TALKING POINTS ON PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Public transit will help Gulf Coast residents rebuild their lives, their economy and help protect the environment.

New Orleans, LA

- Prior to the hurricanes, public transit played a significant economic role in New Orleans, where 5.6% of the overall population used public transit to go to work each day. Weekly ridership totaled 124,000.
- Public transit rates are higher in New Orleans than in other parts of the Gulf South only because they had a public transit system.

Biloxi-Gulfport, MS

- In Biloxi-Gulfport, MS only 0.4% used public transportation to get to work.

Mobile, AL

- In Mobile, AL, 0.6% used public transportation.

Many people in Louisiana displaced by the 2005 storm season have no housing and must commute from other cities to rebuild their communities, their lives and get to work.

- The NAACP Gulf Coast Action Committee is tallying the results of a survey it has conducted. It is finding that transportation is a priority issue for those displaced from New Orleans in a FEMA trailer village of displaced residents -- Renaissance Village located in Baker, La. While FEMA's intention to help these residents was genuine, they have no reliable or consistent transportation. Residents are not able to take jobs that require them to work on weekends. Some residents have had to resign from their jobs or turn down job offers in the New Orleans area because transportation scheduling has changed and no longer includes later bus routes from New Orleans to Baker, Louisiana or vice-versa.

The most vulnerable populations need public transit. Blacks and Latinos (and Asians in New Orleans) use public transit at a higher rate than White residents.

New Orleans, LA

- In New Orleans, 14.4% of Blacks and 5.6% of Latinos used public transit to get to work, while only 1.5% of Whites did.

- Transit use would be much higher if the public transit system was expanded and more reliable.

Biloxi-Gulfport, MS

- In Biloxi-Gulfport, the percentages were 0.8 % of Blacks, 2.0% of Latinos and 0.4% of Whites.
- Transit use would be much higher if people had access to transit.

Mobile, AL

- In Mobile the percentages are 2.1% of Blacks, 1.1% of Latinos, and 0.2% of Whites.
- Transit use would be much higher if people had access to transit.

Minority households have less access to cars than White households.

New Orleans, LA

- In NOLA, 29.2% of Black, 9.4% of Asian, and 14.1% of Latino households did not have access to an automobile, but only 7.8% of White households did not.

“I am back and I want to work, but the jobs are 3 to 11 and the bus doesn’t run at night!”
 -- New Orleans woman in her 50s, Christmas day 2006.

- Students are now attending area high schools all over New Orleans and if they miss the one bus provided daily, or need to stay late at school, they don't have public transportation. The same is true for community college and other students.

Biloxi-Gulfport, MS

- In Biloxi-Gulfport, 13.5% of Black, 8.7% of Asian, and 10.9% of Latino households did not have access to a vehicle, compared with 4.4% of White households.

Mobile, AL

- In Mobile, the percentages are 17.6% Black and 10.8% Latin households lacked access to an automobile. Less Asian households lacked access (3.6%) than White (4.3%).

New Orleans Regional Transportation Authority is operating at a fraction of its pre-2005 storm season level of service.

- RTA has 47% of its routes open, but weekly ridership has ranged from 15,482 to 19,184 over the past six months. It was 124,000 before the storms.

Public transit is even more of an issue in rural areas around the region since Katrina than before.

- In rural Plaquemines Parish, the loss of local businesses means people have to travel as far as 60 miles to a grocery store, retail shopping, health care and to jobs. Yet they have had no regional public transit since the storms.

“In Plaquemines Parish the elderly are unable to receive needed medical service because of lack of organized public transportation.” Rev. Tyronne Edwards

People in rural areas around the region are desperately in need of regional public transit to help them get work.

- A woman who lives in Demopolis, AL (which is very close to the Mississippi border) lost her Mississippi job because her car broke down and she could not afford to fix it. The woman’s family could not allow her to borrow the other car, because her sister was having a difficult pregnancy and the family needed to have the car available to drive the woman’s sister to the hospital at a moment’s notice.
- In Alabama, jobs sites are closing at alarming rates as entire industries shutter post 2005 hurricane season. Building codes for repairing houses, insurance rates, or lack of insurance, have forced people to move inland from the Gulf Coast. It is often more expensive to live inland and people lack the resources to buy or repair their cars.

Pre-storm funding for public transit was minimal and local revenue sources greatly reduced after the 2005 storms.

New Orleans, LA

- RTA has been supported by local sales and hotel taxes and needed and received FEMA funding, which ended November 30, 2006.

Biloxi-Gulfport, MS

- Mississippi Coast Transit Authority receives support from federal state, county and municipal government, but also relies upon fare revenues. Emergency FEMA assistance ended March 31, 2006.

Mobile, AL

- In Alabama, no state funds support public transportation.

Directing Federal rebuilding money to transit would help Gulf Coast residents rebuilding their lives and their economy.

- Regional CDBG disaster relief funding for FY 2006 totaled \$11.5 billion. Directing 0.5 to 2.0 % to transit would yield \$55 to \$230 million, an important start.

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