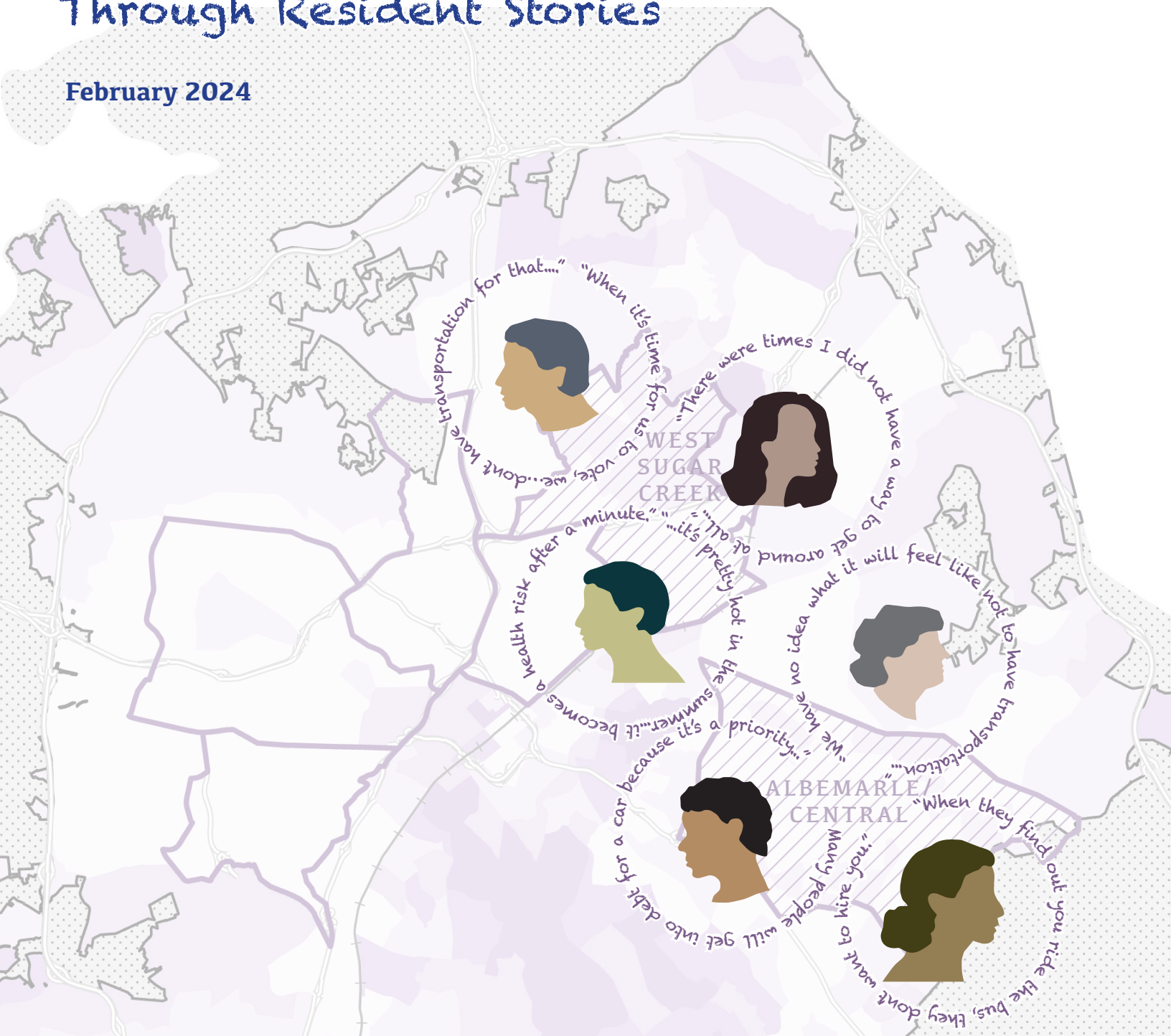


Achieving 10-minute Neighborhoods in Charlotte's Corridors of Opportunity

Understanding Transportation
Opportunities and Challenges
Through Resident Stories

February 2024



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CHARLOTTE

DEPARTMENT OF EARTH,
ENVIRONMENTAL, AND
GEOGRAPHICAL SCIENCES



Why study 10-minute neighborhoods?

The City of Charlotte's Future 2040 Comprehensive Plan, adopted in 2021, envisions the creation of "10-minute neighborhoods" in which residents have access to daily services and amenities - destinations like grocery stores, clinics, parks, daycare, and well-paying jobs - within a short walk, bicycle, or transit trip of their home.

Although being able to easily reach these kinds of essential resources is necessary for social and economic mobility, not all communities have equal access. People living in communities that have historically received less investment due to harmful policies like redlining often experience more challenges accessing the basic resources they need for daily life and often need to travel farther to reach such resources. For residents living in Charlotte's underinvested communities, having safe and reliable transportation options is essential for meeting everyday needs.

This research explores transportation barriers to accessing basic resources - like those described in the 10-minute neighborhood policy - in two of Charlotte's underinvested Corridors of Opportunity: West Sugar Creek and Albemarle/Central. We spoke with 30 residents to better understand their experiences in using transportation to access the resources and services they need to reach on a daily basis.

Our results identify important destinations overlooked in the 10-minute neighborhood goal and highlight ways in which layered transportation barriers contribute to a condition of time poverty - not having enough time to do all the things one needs to do - for many residents of the study communities.

The report concludes with recommendations to help guide urban planners, policymakers, and community advocates in implementing Charlotte's 10-minute neighborhood policy goal in ways that can better serve residents of underinvested urban communities.



City of Charlotte
Future 2040 Plan

Goal 1: 10-Minute Neighborhoods

"All Charlotte households should have access to essential amenities, goods, and services within a comfortable, tree-shaded 10-minute walk, bike, or transit trip by 2040. Not all neighborhoods are expected to include every essential amenity, good, or service, but every resident should have access within a ½ mile walk or a 2-mile bike or transit trip."

This policy goal aims to increase the percentage of households, both new and existing, within a comfortable, tree-shaded 10-minute walk, bike, or transit trip of the following services and amenities:

- Fresh, healthy food opportunities.
- High performance transit station.
- Park, plaza, nature preserve, or other public space.
- Trail, greenway, or other "all ages and abilities (AAA)" bicycle facility.
- A concentration of daily goods and services
- Non-emergency health care services or pharmacy.
- Community facilities (libraries, schools, senior centers, community centers, early childhood education, etc.).
- Financial services (banks or credit unions).
- Family sustaining wage jobs.
- Advanced technology delivery service and supportive digital access.

Study area demographics

Study area residents have median household incomes substantially lower than the Charlotte/Mecklenburg County average. The study areas also have a higher proportion of residents of color and a lower percentage of residents who are homeowners.

	City of Charlotte	West Sugar Creek Corridor	Albemarle/Central Corridor
Median household income	\$76,177	\$42,875	\$39,205
% Home ownership	66.0%	45.1%	42.0%
Race/ethnicity			
Black/African American	20.6%	58.6%	40.0%
Hispanic/Latinx	10.0%	23.6%	28.0%
White	61.7%	11.4%	23.0%
Asian	3.1%	3.0%	5.0%
Other	4.6%	3.4%	3.0%

Data sources: Draft Albemarle Road Corridor Playbook, Draft West Sugar Creek Road Corridor Playbook, U.S. Census American Community Survey 2022 5-Year Estimates.

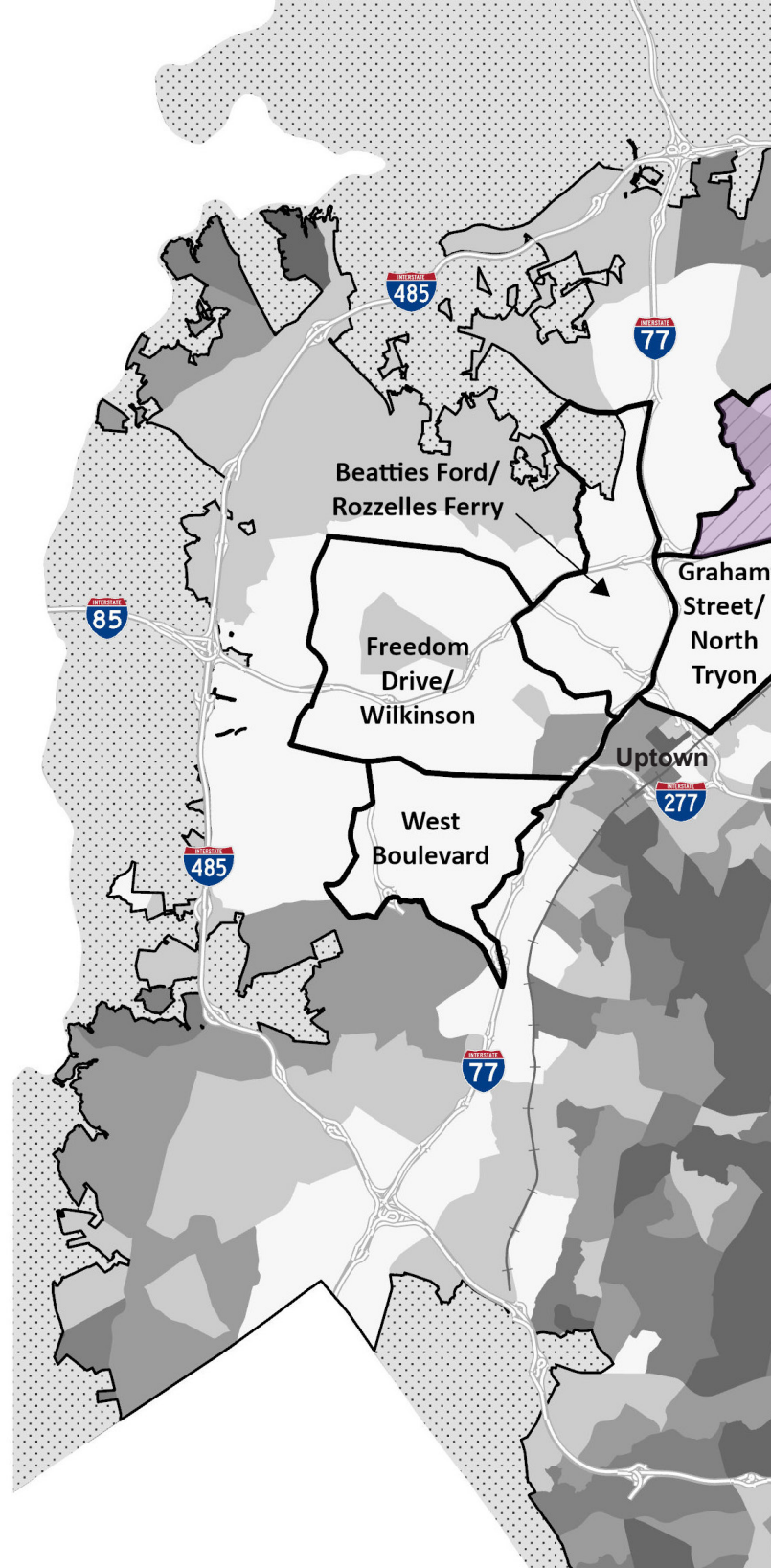
The City of Charlotte's Corridors of Opportunity Program

The Corridors of Opportunity Program is a place-based initiative that seeks to advance racial equity by prioritizing investment in affordable housing, workforce development, and infrastructure in six historically underinvested transportation corridors. Specific program goals include:

- Fostering thriving communities for residents and businesses
- Building lasting legacies
- Growing communities equitably

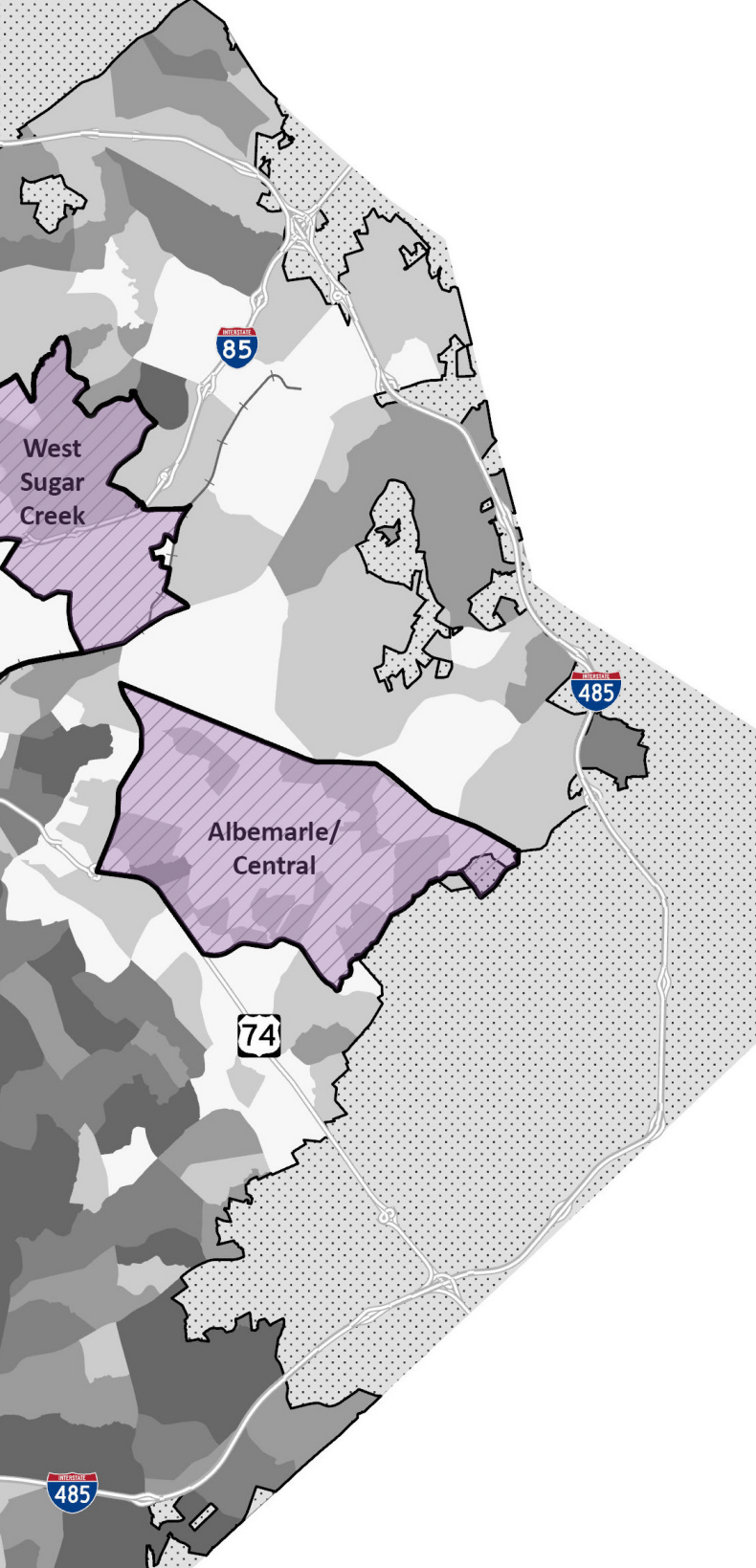
For more information, see:

<https://www.charlottenc.gov/Growth-and-Development/Corridors-of-Opportunity>

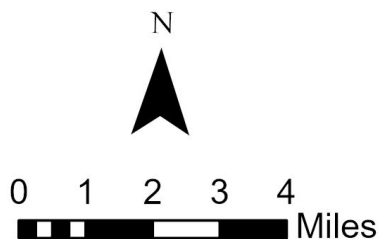
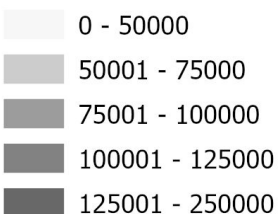


Map design: Lucas Holden

Data sources: Mecklenburg County GIS, City of Charlotte Open Data, NC OneMap, MUTCD



Income (USD)



Study area locations and the built environment

The West Sugar Creek corridor is located northeast of Uptown Charlotte, while the Albemarle/Central corridor is located to its east. Both corridors are auto-centric environments that are often unsafe for pedestrians and other non-motorized users.

West Sugar Creek Road Corridor



West Sugar Creek Road & Wilson Lane

The West Sugar Creek Road Corridor, located north of Uptown Charlotte, includes the Sugar Creek area as well as the Hidden Valley and Derita neighborhoods. The I-85 interchange that separates the neighborhoods is known for a concentration of economy hotels and a high incidence of crime. Although the corridor is served by light rail along its southern edge, pedestrian infrastructure throughout the area is often unwelcoming and unsafe.

Albemarle Road/Central Corridor



Central Avenue & Eastway Drive

The Albemarle Road/Central Avenue Corridor stretches east of Uptown Charlotte. Central Avenue is a busy and rapidly gentrifying commercial corridor that supports an array of small, multicultural businesses and serves as the primary arterial for residential neighborhoods to the north and south. The corridor is currently served by the CATS #9 bus route and is the planned route for the future Gold Line streetcar extension.

Resident interviews

To understand the transportation experiences of residents from these two communities, we conducted 30 semi-structured interviews between January and April of 2023. Interviewees were recruited in collaboration with non-profit organizations and community institutions serving the study areas.

Interviewees could choose to participate in the interview in person (24 participants) or virtually via Zoom (6 participants). Interviews lasted approximately one hour. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Participants were provided with a \$50 Visa gift card in appreciation of their time. Following each interview, participants completed a brief demographic survey. Interviewee characteristics are described in the table to the right.

Interview questions

1. *What are all the places you need to go to on a regular basis within a typical week? Are there other places you need to go that are also important, but that you either don't need to go to or can't get to as often?*
2. *Do you ever have trouble reaching the places you mentioned previously? If so, could you please share an example?*
3. *What is your opinion of the City of Charlotte's 10-minute neighborhood policy? What do you think would need to happen in order to turn your community into a 10-minute neighborhood?*

	Interviewees	City of Charlotte
Race/ethnicity		
Black/African American	33.3%	20.6%
Hispanic/Latinx	40.0%	10.0%
White	23.4%	61.7%
Asian	0.0%	3.1%
Other	0.2%	4.6%
Annual household income		
Less than \$10,000	23.3%	3.7%
\$10,000 to \$24,999	36.7%	8.2%
\$25,000 to \$49,999	26.7%	19.7%
\$50,000 to \$99,999	10.0%	32.5%
\$100,000 or more	3.3%	36.0%
Number of cars in household		
3 cars	3.3%	25.1%
2 cars	26.7%	38.1%
1 car	43.3%	31.3%
0 cars	26.7%	5.5%
Primary language spoken		
English	63.7%	87.9%
Spanish	36.7%	7.7%
Home ownership		
Rent	70.0%	34.0%
Own	16.7%	66.0%
Hotel/shelter/provided by others	13.3%	N/A
Gender identity		
Female	73.3%	51.1%
Male	36.7%	48.9%
Age		
18-35 years	23.3%	22.7%
36-65 years	50.0%	38.8%
65+ years	26.7%	16.3%

Data sources: Participant demographic survey, U.S. Census American Community Survey 2022 5-Year Estimates.

Priority destinations

Some destinations participants identified as their highest priorities align closely with the 10-minute neighborhood policy goal's destination categories: employment, grocery stores, and medical care.

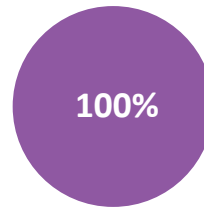
Participants also identified several important destinations that are not included within the 10-minute neighborhood policy measures. For example, many renters shared that *going to the laundromat* was especially important as many lived in apartment complexes that did not have functioning laundry machines. *Access to social services* was critical for seniors who depended on fixed monthly payments (i.e., disability and/or social security).

For recent immigrants, being able to travel to *free English language classes, immigrant-serving non-profit organizations, the immigration office, and payday loan services* (for unbanked individuals) was crucial.

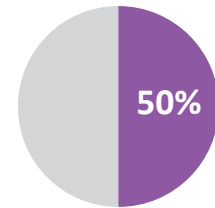
Additionally, being able to reach *social support networks* such as friends, family, and/or religious facilities was a high priority for many participants.

However, nearly all interviewees – particularly those without a vehicle – described significant challenges accessing even these destinations. Many also had *difficulty seeking and obtaining jobs* due to transportation-related challenges.

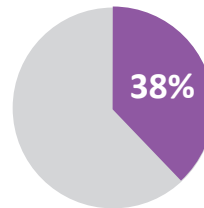
Some participants suggested that *more affordable and culturally relevant grocery stores* such as Hispanic/Latinx markets were needed in their community as the options within a feasible travel distance did not provide the kinds of food they needed at prices they were able to afford. *Travel to medical appointments* was particularly challenging for seniors, who often relied on transportation provided by insurance carriers that was inconvenient, unreliable, and extremely time-consuming.



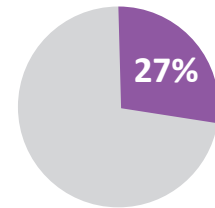
Grocery store



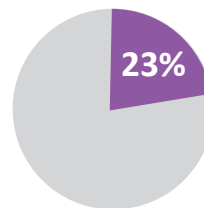
Employment



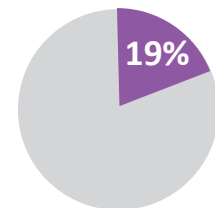
Medical care



Children's school



Church



Laundromat

15%
Friends, salon

13%
Greenway, restaurants, clothing store

8%
Social Security Board, pet store, park, pharmacy, downtown, Immigration, gas station

4%
Recreation center, art shows, family, bike shop, farmers market, bank, camera store, library, community college, payday loan services, hardware store, social services

Transportation barriers


When asked to share their experiences with transportation, many participants described a range of compounding challenges that prevented them from easily reaching the destinations they most need to access. Themes that arose ranged from access to employment to unsafe pedestrian environments to exposure to extreme weather. Summaries of the most commonly described transportation barriers

are provided below. Participants who did not own a car experienced significantly more transportation challenges accessing needed resources, while car owners experienced relatively few challenges, if any.

In the sections that follow, pseudonyms are used in order to avoid identifying individual study participants.

Exposure to extreme weather conditions


Some interviewees described arduous journeys to work or other essential destinations given inefficient bus service and extreme weather conditions. Laura recalls developing hypothermia waiting in the cold, pouring rain for a bus that never arrived. Arturo, a Venezuelan immigrant, describes the difficulties he has experienced doing his family's laundry in harsh weather conditions. Because he did not have a working laundry machine in his apartment complex or access to a car, he often struggled to carry clothes to the local laundromat on foot: **"There were times I did not have a way to get around at all. I had to take my laundry on my back in the cold, because I did not have any other way."**



"There were times I did not have a way to get around at all. I had to take my laundry on my back in the cold, because I did not have any other way."

Participants also expressed concern about walking in Charlotte's summer heat. Sherry, an immigrant from St. Lucia, shares, **"When it is very, very hot – for me, I get a headache when even just driving in the car. It's too much for me. I can't take the heat. For me that's why I ride in the car."** Sherry expresses that even if she had the opportunity to walk to convenient destinations in the summer, she would choose to drive due to the heat.

Others are concerned that the heat will only get worse given Charlotte's rapid growth. Alyssa, a 67-year-old woman living in affordable senior housing, argues, **"You've got to take into consideration that it gets pretty hot here in the summer and the more they tear down the trees and the more buildings they make, the hotter it's going to be. And 10 minutes in that heat is a lot. It becomes a health risk after a minute."**



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Limited access to opportunity

Participants shared stories about many ways in which they felt their opportunities for improving their quality of life were limited due to transportation challenges. We consistently found that carless participants experienced significant barriers to gaining employment. Some interviewees mentioned having been turned down, or having had to turn down, a job opportunity due to not owning a vehicle. Anne, a houseless mother who recently moved to Charlotte from Ohio, shares, **“We don't seek out a lot of jobs that are anywhere further than five miles, because you're talking a two-to-four-hour bus ride each way.”**

Interviewees shared that some employers require applicants to have a car. Jamie describes searching for employment as a carless individual: **“I mean, it limits the jobs. You know, jobs aren't real cool with you being late – it doesn't look good, a good reflection for you. Some places, when they find out you don't have a car and you ride the bus, they don't want to hire you because they know there may be some trouble.”**

When asked if they could seek a job closer to home, several participants responded that there were not any living wage jobs in close proximity to their home. Some who did find jobs too far away to feasibly access by walking, cycling, or public transit incurred additional costs using rideshare services to commute to work.

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Sammy, a woman in her mid 30s who lives in a hotel, explained that transportation becomes more difficult in the days before she receives her paycheck each week: **“I'm going to say that between Tuesday and Wednesday, it's hard to catch [rideshare] rides because I don't get paid until Wednesday. So yeah, Tuesday and Wednesday are like the most difficult days. So I really don't plan anything around those days to go out because either I'm walking to the bus stop or I'm waiting on someone for a ride [to work].”**

Additionally, some parents shared ways in which limited transportation options affected access to opportunity for their children as families without cars had difficulty reaching parks, playgrounds, and after-school activities. Transportation challenges also prevented some interviewees from exercising their right to vote. Janet, a mobility-impaired Black woman living in a senior housing community, shares, **“When it's time for us to vote, we...don't have transportation for that. They don't come around and ask, ‘Do you need transportation to go vote or are you going to vote?’”**

These experiences reinforce the critical nature of convenient and reliable access to basic resources, especially for carless individuals, to be able to obtain employment and to fully participate in public and civic life.

Necessity of car ownership



Many people will get into debt for a car because it's a priority, because there is no transportation. It is needed because it takes a lot of time when there is not sufficient transportation, and it gets difficult for work, getting food. It's been hard for us.

Many interviewees had previously lived without a car elsewhere – both within the U.S. and abroad – and felt compelled to purchase a vehicle upon moving to Charlotte. Multiple participants even referred to car ownership as “having transportation,” as if cars were the only feasible means of travel.

Immigrants who routinely used public transit in their home countries were eager to make the shift to car ownership. Marta insists, **“You have to have a car in this country.”** She further explains: **“It took us a lot to get a scooter [purchased three months after arriving]. We did not have the resources. Many people will get into debt for a car because it's a priority, because there is no transportation. It is needed because it takes a lot of time when there is not sufficient transportation, and it gets difficult for work, getting food. It's been hard for us. We have to walk a lot. We have a lot of blessings, but transportation is difficult.”**

Jesse, a Guatemalan immigrant in her 30s who is prideful of her ability to drive herself to work, remembers the difficulty of not having a car: **“When I did not have a car, I felt like my wings were held back, like I could not fly. That is why**

I now have a car and I go to work and do what I need to do. Now I help other neighbors. New people arrive who cannot drive, they have babies, and they ask if I can take them somewhere. I tell them with pleasure I will take them since I now have my car and I know what it's like not to have a car.”

Many destinations important to immigrants are not well-served by Charlotte's hub-and-spoke transit service model that often requires lengthy out-of-direction and multiple transfers. Marta and Andres recall spending more than five hours on public transit to get to a required check-in at the immigration office, a trip they estimate could have taken 20 minutes by car. Marta describes the ordeal: **“[The immigration office] is far. If the appointment is at 12:00pm we have to leave [Central/Albemarle] at 7:00am. It was terrible outside...it was more than five hours. That day was terrible. It's too far to walk and with the cold, I could not.”**

Furthermore, interviewees who do own cars expressed fear about losing the ability to drive or facing repairs they could not afford. **“We have no idea what will happen when we don't have a car anymore,”** worried one aging interviewee. **“We have no idea what it will feel like not to have transportation.”**

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Navigating dangerous roadways

Numerous participants, especially seniors, expressed fears about crossing busy roadways. For example, residents interviewed at a senior community in the Albemarle Road/Central Corridor live within walking distance to restaurants, a grocery store, a coffee shop, and a used bookstore. Many sense that their community could be a 10-minute neighborhood, but they do not feel safe crossing a heavily-trafficked, four-lane arterial to reach these amenities.



And if I go out to eat, and if I walk to the restaurant, you have to look at your neighborhood and decide, is this something that I want to do in the late evening or not?

And we done have two people over here get hit, and one got killed right here crossing the street. The lady was trying to get off the bus and she was crossing Central Avenue, and she was crossing and got knocked all the way across the street."



One resident explains, "I'm more afraid of getting hit because sometimes there's not a safe place to walk." Johnny, a resident in his 70s, recounts the horrendous incident that resulted in the recent death of a neighbor: "And we done have two people over here get hit, and one got killed right here crossing the street. Right in front of [the church]. The lady was trying to get off the bus and she was crossing Central Avenue, and she was crossing and got knocked all the way across the street."

Others strategize carefully about when and where to cross certain streets, not only due to traffic, but also because of crime, complicating walking trips to nearby destinations. One female interviewee explains: "And if I go out to eat, and if I walk to the restaurant, you have to look at your neighborhood and decide, is this something that I want to do in the late evening or not? This side, once you cross W.T. Harris [Boulevard], going towards Independence [Boulevard], there tends - sometimes you'll hear about - shootings. We don't get it on this side, but you hear about it on that side. So I know I wouldn't walk over there because you don't know what is out there."

Participants also commented on the high speed of cars traveling the corridors' main thoroughfares and crossing distances that were too long for them to safely navigate. Although many resources and places of interest within the study communities are located along these corridors, interviewees generally did not feel comfortable walking to local destinations given the unsafe and auto-centric nature of the built environment.

Potential benefits

While all but one interviewee had no knowledge of the 10-minute neighborhood policy goal prior to participating in this study, all expressed support after reviewing the policy description.

Potential benefits interviewees anticipated resulting from the policy included:

- safer pedestrian environments;
- increased ability to walk for exercise and enjoy the outdoors;
- more opportunities for encountering new people and learning about new places;
- reduced expenditure on gas and/or rideshare services; and
- decreased levels of air pollution.

However, the potential benefit participants mentioned most often was the amount of time they could save if routine trips took only ten minutes.

Interviewees expressed clear excitement at the prospect of having more time to complete other important tasks or participate in leisure activities instead of spending time waiting for a bus or walking extreme distances. One transit-reliant respondent exclaimed, **“Ten minutes sounds a lot better than three hours!”** Another dreamed, **“I’d have more time to do things like yoga.”** One woman imagined a less stressful existence: **“I’m going to save time to be able to do other things, to arrive earlier from work and rest. And then having everything closer will help you not to be so stressed and you can feel more relaxed.”**

It was clear that such a reduction in time spent on daily travel would make a meaningful difference in study participants’ quality of life, including improvements in both physical and mental well-being.

Concerns

Participants also shared concerns about the 10-minute neighborhood policy. Some lamented the lengthy timeframe, stating that the changes the policy proposed were needed sooner – even immediately, particularly for carless individuals. Others worried about gentrification and/or displacement that might result from infrastructure investments as well as costs that might be incurred by low-income residents through increased taxes. Several interviewees also questioned whether the policy initiative would be implemented equitably and would realistically benefit them given the history of disinvestment in their community.

Potential interventions

Interviewees agreed that Charlotte’s 10-minute neighborhood goal was ambitious and would necessitate transformational interventions to be effectively realized in their communities. Many highlighted the need for more – and improved – sidewalks, bicycle lanes, and crosswalks. Others noted that improved access to affordable sources of groceries and household items, including grocery stores, corner stores and neighborhood restaurants, would be necessary to create a 10-minute neighborhood in their area. Nearly all interviewees, regardless whether they owned a car, mentioned the necessity of improvements in transit service, infrastructure, and transit user education. Suggested interventions included additional bus stops, increased frequency of service, improved route network connectivity, and targeted education initiatives.

Policy recommendations

Our findings highlight the important services and amenities upon which residents from historically disinvested neighborhoods of Charlotte rely, the transportation challenges they face in reaching those destinations, and their suggested interventions. These results further highlight the importance of contextualizing Charlotte's ten-minute neighborhood policy goal as the needs of residents in underserved

communities may not be represented by the one-size-fits-all resource categories described in the policy. We conclude with a series of recommendations and a discussion of ways in which the measurement and implementation of chrono-urbanism policy goals might be further developed to improve social and economic mobility in underinvested Charlotte communities.

1. Base policy metrics on resident *experience* of travel time.

Participant experiences clarify that distance is not a reasonable proxy for travel time in communities that lack frequent, efficient transit service and safe, connected pedestrian infrastructure. Simply locating resources and amenities within a half mile of residents' homes will not make a meaningful difference in terms of access. This is particularly true for elderly individuals, families with children, and individuals with mobility impairments.

2. Develop policy categories to serve immigrants, seniors, renters, and transit-reliant individuals.

Many resources mentioned by our interviewees – social services, laundromats, immigration services, social security, and payday loan services – which are both specific and necessary for communities that comprise a high proportion of renters, senior citizens, immigrants, and/or transit-reliant individuals – are not included in the 10-minute neighborhood policy language. Policy goals should be developed together with residents to ensure that future interventions enhance access to the resources that are needed most.

3. Prioritize frequent, efficient transit service and safe pedestrian environments.

Charlotte's transit system does not effectively serve residents who rely upon it to access important resources. Many respondents felt that more bus stops and more frequent, reliable transit service were needed. In addition, pedestrians must feel safe and secure walking to destinations in their community, including bus stops, if they are to avoid relying on car travel. Being freed from needing to own a car would help to advance equitable outcomes in the study areas.

4. Seek synergies with climate change resilience policies and initiatives.

Charlotte's 10-minute neighborhood policy goal notes that trips to essential amenities should ideally be "tree-shaded," acknowledging the importance of limiting pedestrian exposure to heat and direct sun. As the effects of climate change intensify, careful attention should be paid to the health implications of time spent outdoors for individuals using modes of active transportation such as those promoted by the 10-minute neighborhood policy goal.

Conclusions

Chrono-urbanism policies like Charlotte's 10-minute neighborhood policy goal provide a much-needed perspective on the ways in which daily travel is experienced, particularly for transportation-disadvantaged individuals living in underinvested urban areas. However, the categories and metrics used to assess such policies must be considered relative to the specific contexts in which they will be implemented. Ideally, such categories and metrics would be developed in partnership with community members in order to achieve equitable outcomes that can help to meaningfully improve social and economic mobility.

The nature of interventions needed to achieve 10-minute neighborhoods in the two Charlotte study communities would be truly transformational. Based on the experiences of transportation barriers faced by study participants, we argue that this work must be reparative in order to improve the socioeconomic circumstances of people living in underinvested communities. While this study focuses specifically on two communities in Charlotte, NC, the lessons learned from this research can be applied to help guide the development and implementation of chrono-urbanism policy goals in other disinvested communities across the U.S.

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City of Charlotte policy resources

Charlotte Future 2040 Comprehensive Plan
<https://cltfuture2040.com/>

Corridors of Opportunity Initiative
<https://www.charlottenc.gov/Growth-and-Development/Corridors-of-Opportunity>

Research team



Katherine Idziorek, AICP is a community-engaged researcher who holds an Interdisciplinary PhD in Urban Design and Planning from the University of Washington. Katherine’s research examines the role of place-based resources in supporting community resilience and wellbeing with a focus on the role of transportation in helping community members to access resources. Her teaching includes courses in spatial thinking, cartographic design, and the urban form. Before turning to a full-time academic career, Katherine practiced for eight years as a professional urban designer in the greater Seattle region, where her work focused on multimodal transportation planning and long-range community visioning.



Michelle E. Zuñiga, AICP holds a PhD in Urban and Environmental Planning and Policy from the University of California, Irvine. Since 2012, Michelle’s research has focused on Latinx communities, particularly low-income, immigrant communities, and how they experience and respond to neighborhood change, environmental injustice, threats of displacement, and anti-immigrant sentiment. Michelle explores their perspectives and experiences in the context of planning processes and urban policy taking shape in their communities. Michelle uses qualitative tools, participatory action research methods, and interdisciplinary approaches to better understand the multifaceted dimensions of urban complexities related to neighborhood change and environmental justice.

