

Chapter 18: Poverty

At first it might not be obvious what connection, if any, exists between how we manage growth and poverty. But what if we were manage growth in ways that increased the number of jobs providing a living wage for those below the poverty line? Then what if we also manage growth to improve public transportation so the poor need not buy a car for commuting and shopping? We could also provide incentives for building affordable housing near the best places of work, the best schools, and other locations where the poor are provided with full and equal opportunities to improve their lot.

For the average American family transportation expenses are second only to housing. According to data presented in the Surface Transportation Policy Project report *Transportation Costs and the American Dream*¹²⁹, 19.3¢ out of every dollar spent by a typical family goes to getting to work, shopping, and play by car. About half of the expense goes to buying a car; the other half for gasoline, insurance, maintenance, etc. Again, these figures are for the *average* American family. For the poorest 20% of the population, transportation costs are proportionally much higher. In fact for the poor getting around by car consumes 40¢ out of every dollar left after taxes. Where buses and other public transit are available, travel costs are reduced by at least 50%. Thus the more we can do to manage growth to reduce transportation cost, the more successful we will be in helping the poor achieve home ownership and other parts of the American dream.

One option for reducing transportation cost is to manage growth in ways that make buses and other public transit more viable and desirable. At one time it was generally believed that public transportation only became viable when residential density reached eight to ten units per acre.¹³⁰ While it remains true that higher density increases the viability of transit, other factors such as street layout and land use mixture are also important.

In the past, housing for the poor would be concentrated, which led to the creation of pockets of poverty, especially when the pockets were far removed from jobs, good schools, and the other factors key to enabling the poor to improve their condition. It is far more effective to disperse low-income housing throughout a community, which increases the likelihood that the poor will live near good schools, good jobs, and good parks and other recreation facilities.¹³¹

¹²⁹ The report *Transportation Costs and the American Dream* can be downloaded from <http://www.transact.org/>

¹³⁰ Boris Pushkarev and Jeffrey M. Zupan, *Public Transportation and Land Use Policy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977).

¹³¹ For further detail on how to increase the supply and benefits of affordable housing see *Affordable Housing and Smart Growth: Making the Connection* published by the Smart Growth Network and available for download at: <http://www.neighborhoodcoalition.org/pdfs/AH%20and%20SG.pdf>