



No Car, No Job; No Job, No Car:

Solving the Transportation Paradox

Executive Summary

The impact of Northeast Ohio's geographic sprawl on the regional economy has concerned the Fund for Our Economic Future since its beginning. The Fund's focus on the topic accelerated with [The Geography of Jobs](#) report in 2015, the 2016 Fund-sponsored work of PolicyBridge titled [Roads Less Traveled](#), the Fund's research on job hubs and the elevation of job access as a regional priority in [The Two Tomorrows](#). In 2019, the Fund sharpened its attention on the transportation challenges for workers and employers caused by sprawl with the launch of The Paradox Prize – a quest for solutions to the “no car, no job; no job, no car” dilemma. The project elevated awareness of transportation as an economic competitiveness issue for the entire region, not just urban areas. And it demonstrated that creative approaches and solutions are possible.

With financial support from several sponsors¹, The Paradox Prizes were awarded to eight pilot projects² from among more than 150 proposals. Collectively the projects worked with more than 400 employers and benefited more than 1,300 residents.

Four projects have been sustained beyond the pilot phase, three with permanent funding:

- [Let's Get to Work Lorain County](#). \$100,000. Expanded the frequency and hours of the public transit system and established an electric car-sharing service. The project will continue to operate through at least 2023 thanks to an infusion of American Rescue Plan funding.
- [Rural Mobility Solutions](#). (Wayne County) \$100,000. Enabled an existing vanpool system to purchase routing software, which allowed creation of an on-demand, curb-to-curb service. With the launch of Wayne County Transit supported by a grant from the Ohio Department of Transportation, the service is continuing.
- [Transit Go](#). (Lake County) \$75,000. Established a program of free fares for riders traveling to and from employers on new transit routes that provide transportation to previously underserved areas. A successful levy campaign to support LakeTran will continue to support this service.
- [Healthy Transportation Choices](#). (Cuyahoga County) \$98,000. Provided free transit passes for many of MetroHealth's frontline employees as an incentive to attract and

retain employees, help them improve their health and be more environmentally sustainable. MetroHealth now includes this program in its employee benefits package.

In addition, [Stark Career Connect](#) used a \$100,000 prize to integrate transportation into workforce development services, providing a variety of individualized supports for those needing transportation help. [FlexRide](#) in Summit Count was awarded \$75,000 to launch a door-to-door, on-demand service connecting workers in Akron with employers in northern Summit County and other nearby job hubs. [Career Access Navigation](#) received \$100,000 to provide bus passes and access to an electric car-sharing service, among other supports, enabling job seekers to reach El Barrio Workforce Development Center in Cleveland, demonstrating new approaches to greater transportation equity. [Get2Work Now](#) also received \$100,000 to create a partnership of manufacturers and clergy organizations that developed a program using church vans and volunteer drivers to get residents of primarily Black neighborhoods to interviews, training programs and jobs.

The pilot projects generated several important lessons:

Transportation is everybody's business.

When employers cannot find or keep workers because they are struggling with transportation to the job, the entire region suffers. Northeast Ohio loses jobs and companies to regions that are better at easing the path to and from work. This reality makes the issue a vital one for the Fund. Public policy decisions contribute to both the problem and to potential solutions. That make public voices vital.

Success is building on the existing public transit system, not blowing it up.

Transit agencies provide a core of essential transportation services but they cannot be all things to all people. Even with the essential addition of new state and federal resources, gaps will exist. Creative leveraging of transit system resources and operations is the only way to realistically build effective transportation links among employers and workers.

Flexible funding matters.

Funding cuts and legal constraints often prevent transit agencies from experimenting with service improvements. Flexible funding through efforts like The Paradox Prize enables exploration, identification of problems, and experimenting with solutions. A state innovation fund would enable much greater experimentation that could result in more responsive and nimble transit organizations.

Workforce development and transportation go hand in hand.

Workforce organizations are in a unique position to understand workers' transportation barriers and needs. They should partner more closely with transportation providers to develop creative ways to increase access to jobs.

Transportation needs to be factored into business decisions sooner.

Businesses and those who assist them in location decisions too often overlook employee transportation issues. The prevailing assumption that everyone drives leads some businesses to make flawed location choices resulting in difficulty attracting and keeping employees. Employers

need to prioritize transportation considerations and to ask their current and potential talent how they can help address transportation issues.

Businesses need more support to adopt solutions. It is no surprise that businesses making location decisions without considering transportation are not likely to know how to address their employees' and job seekers' mobility issues. Businesses need help to understand their workers' needs and possible solutions. And the region needs more vocal business champions of solutions to transportation issues.

Better transportation changes lives. Removing transportation barriers means people can find and keep better paying jobs, save money, and avoid worries about getting work. These are tangible, real-life impacts. And they contribute to a more prosperous and successful region for all, regardless of race or place.

¹ Complete lists of the sponsors and of the Advisory and Selection committees are included in the full Paradox Prize report at www.paradoxprize.com.

² The [full report](#) includes longer project descriptions and lists of the collaborators on each. These highlight the essential importance of collaboration in tackling this issue. Teams ranged from two to 11 members and included public transit agencies, workforce service providers, and others, such as Sway Mobility, an electric vehicle car-sharing company that partnered in two of the pilot projects.