

DEMOGRAPHIA

New York Metropolitan Area  
Commuting & Employment:  
*Suburbanization Associated with  
Shorter Commutes*

Analysis of the 2006 American Community Survey



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**METROPOLITAN NEW YORK:  
SUBURBANIZATION ASSOCIATED WITH SHORTER COMMUTES  
Analysis of 2006 American Community Survey Data**

One of the most enduring urban myths suggests that most jobs are in the core of metropolitan areas, which makes commuting from the far suburbs more difficult. Thus, as fuel prices have increased, many have expected that people will begin moving from farther out in the suburbs to locations closer to the cores. Indeed, in Australia, much of the urban planning regime of the last decade has been based upon this assumption --- that urban areas must not be allowed to expand because the residents on the urban fringe won't be able to get to work.

The problem with this view, however, is that it could not be more wrong with respect to the modern urban area. As motorization has expanded and people have moved to the suburbs, so have the jobs. This can be illustrated by considering the case of the New York metropolitan area (the combined statistical area), which is home to the second largest central business district in the world and by far the largest in the United States. Centralization gets no more intense, at least in the United States, than in the New York metropolitan area.

Yet an examination of work trip data from the 2006 American Community Survey (produced by the United States Bureau of the Census) indicates that jobs have dispersed throughout the New York metropolitan area and that commuting to jobs in the suburbs takes considerably less time than commuting to the city.

Workers who live in the outer suburbs of New York have the shortest work trip travel times, at 29.8 minutes. This compares to the New York metropolitan average of 32.9 minutes. Workers living in the inner suburbs spend 30.7 minutes getting to work. The workers who have the longest commutes live in the outer boroughs of New York City --- at 41.5 minutes. This contrasts sharply with the 30.1 minute average for workers living in the core borough --- Manhattan, home of more than 2.2 million jobs.

Another urban myth regards the jobs-housing balance and the idea that planning should seek to reduce commute distances and times by seeking to generally equalize the spatial distribution of workers and employment. The myth goes further to suggest that this can be accomplished by higher densities and strong centralization, characteristics in which Manhattan excels. Yet, Manhattan is characterized by a jobs-housing *imbalance* of major proportions. There are nearly 275 jobs for every 100 resident workers. It is no wonder that Manhattanites can get to work so quickly compared to others living in the city of New York.

In fact, the outer boroughs have the second most intense jobs-housing *imbalance*, with only 68 jobs for every 100 resident workers. Richmond (Staten Island) has the largest deficit of jobs, with 56 per 100 resident workers, while Kings County (Brooklyn) has the lowest deficit, with 73 jobs per 100 resident workers. Overall, the city has 115 jobs for every 100 resident workers.

Jobs and housing are most in balance in the suburbs. Among the inner suburban counties, there are 97 jobs for every 100 resident workers. The inner suburban counties also demonstrate a balance among themselves. The largest deficit is in Hudson County, with 89 jobs per 100

resident workers --- a figure well above any of the four outer New York City boroughs. Bergen County has the highest surplus, with 102 jobs for every resident worker.

There are 93 jobs for every 100 resident workers in the outer suburban counties. However, the disparities are greater than in the inner suburban counties. Ocean County has the largest deficit, with 69 jobs per 100 resident workers, which would place it at the New York City outer borough average. All other outer suburban counties for which there is data have jobs-housing balances superior to all of the New York City outer boroughs. Mercer County, which contains three large employment draws, the New Jersey state capital (at Trenton), Princeton University and the Route 1 information technology corridor, has 126 jobs for every resident worker (only Manhattan is higher).

The extent to which jobs have become dispersed around the metropolitan area is illustrated by the work trip travel times to job locations, rather than by residence location. Here, Manhattan, the ultimate American business district from an urban planning perspective scores very poorly. The average commuter working in Manhattan travels 48.5 minutes one-way to work. This is approximately *double* the national average. Workers commuting to the outer boroughs of New York City spend 36.9 minutes. The situation is much better in the suburbs. For jobs in the inner suburban counties, the average one-way work trip travel time is 29.3 minutes. Perhaps surprisingly, people working in the outer suburban counties spend the *least* amount of time getting to work, at 24.8 minutes, roughly the national average.

It is to be expected that residents of Manhattan, the most dense employment center in the world, would have relatively shorter one-way work trip travel times. Overall, New York commuters travel 32.9 minutes one-way to work, while workers who live in Manhattan complete their trips in 30.1 minutes.

The extent of the employment dispersion is indicated by the fact that the outer suburbs have at least 32 percent of the metropolitan area's employment. The inner suburban counties have 27 percent and the outer boroughs of New York City have 19 percent of the metropolitan area's employment. Manhattan has only 22 percent of the metropolitan area's employment. Peter Gordon and Harry Richardson of the University of Southern California have noted, "suburbanization has turned out to be the traffic safety valve."<sup>1</sup> That is certainly the case in New York.

Transit is well known for the large role that it plays in transporting people to work in Manhattan. Approximately 73 percent of workers commuting to Manhattan took transit. This figure falls off sharply as distances increase from the core. For jobs in the outer boroughs of New York City, transit accounts for 36 percent of commuting. Only 9 percent of commuters to jobs in the inner suburbs use transit, while the figure drops off to less than 3 percent in the outer suburbs.

All of this yields exactly the opposite conclusions that would be suggested from the conventional wisdom. Automobile use in the lower density, more distant suburbs is associated with shorter commutes. Commutes to the core, principally by transit, are much longer. In fact, the average

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Gordon and Harry W. Richardson, "Prove It: The Costs and Benefits of Sprawl," *Brookings Review*, Fall 1998.

employee in Manhattan spends the equivalent of more than one-month's worth of 8 hour work days more than the commuter to an outer suburban job just getting to and from work. Sometimes it helps to look at the data.

**Table 1**  
**BASIC COMMUTING DATA:**  
**NEW YORK METROPOLITAN AREA (COMBINED STATISTICAL AREA)**

County, State	Average Work Trip Travel Time (Minutes)		Jobs-Housing Balance		
	By Residential Location	By Work Location	Jobs per 100 Workers (100=Balance)	Share of Metropolitan Area Workers	Share of Metropolitan Area Jobs
New York County, New York	30.1	48.5	273	8.2%	22.4%
CORE (MANHATTAN)	30.1	48.5	273	8.2%	22.4%
Bronx County, New York	40.6	35.6	70	5.0%	3.5%
Kings County, New York	41.4	38.3	73	10.2%	7.4%
Queens County, New York	41.8	37.5	65	10.2%	6.6%
Richmond County, New York	42.6	28.5	56	2.1%	1.2%
BALANCE: CITY OF NEW YORK	41.5	36.9	68	27.5%	18.7%
CITY OF NEW YORK	39.0	43.3	115	35.7%	41.1%
Bergen County, New Jersey	28.2	27.6	102	4.3%	4.4%
Essex County, New Jersey	30.3	32.2	108	3.4%	3.7%
Hudson County, New Jersey	31.7	33.9	89	2.9%	2.6%
Middlesex County, New Jersey	31.1	27.5	96	3.8%	3.7%
Nassau County, New York	33.0	27.8	90	6.2%	5.6%
Union County, New Jersey	27.0	28.6	100	2.5%	2.5%
Westchester County, New York	31.0	29.4	100	4.3%	4.3%
INNER SUBURBS	30.7	29.3	97	27.4%	26.6%
Dutchess County, New York	29.8	22.9	89	1.4%	1.2%
Fairfield County, Connecticut	27.7	26.6	105	4.3%	4.5%
Hunterdon County, New Jersey	32.4	27.0	90	0.7%	0.6%
Litchfield County, Connecticut	25.2			1.0%	
Mercer County, New Jersey	27.1	27.4	126	1.7%	2.1%
Monmouth County, New Jersey	32.4	23.8	90	3.1%	2.8%
Morris County, New Jersey	28.3	30.6	116	2.5%	2.8%
New Haven County, Connecticut	23.3	21.1	92	4.0%	3.7%
Ocean County, New Jersey	30.8	21.3	69	2.4%	1.6%
Orange County, New York	31.7	22.0	85	1.7%	1.4%
Passaic County, New Jersey	26.6	25.6	83	2.2%	1.8%
Pike County, Pennsylvania					
Putnam County, New York					
Rockland County, New York	29.1	24.5	85	1.3%	1.1%
Somerset County, New Jersey	29.8	30.1	108	1.6%	1.7%
Suffolk County, New York	29.4	23.1	87	6.9%	6.0%
Sussex County, New Jersey	39.4			0.8%	
Ulster County, New York	25.7	20.9	82	0.9%	0.7%
Warren County, New Jersey	34.9			0.6%	
OUTER SUBURBS	28.8	24.8	93	36.9%	32.3%
NEW YORK CONSOLIDATED AREA	32.9	33.6	102	100.0%	100.0%

Calculated from American Community Survey (2006)  
Blank spaces indicate no data

**Table 2**  
**TRANSIT COMMUTING**  
**NEW YORK METROPOLITAN AREA (COMBINED STATISTICAL AREA)**

County, State	By Residential Location			By Job Location		
	Total Employment	Commute by Transit	Transit Share	Total Employment	Commute by Transit	Transit Share
New York County, New York	826,907	468,612	56.7%	2,255,545	1,649,001	73.1%
CORE (MANHATTAN)	826,907	468,612	56.7%	2,255,545	1,649,001	73.1%
Bronx County, New York	499,886	283,635	56.7%	349,236	128,902	36.9%
Kings County, New York	1,030,433	614,824	59.7%	751,548	311,525	41.5%
Queens County, New York	1,024,875	513,949	50.1%	664,412	215,258	32.4%
Richmond County, New York	215,446	70,311	32.6%	120,580	19,209	15.9%
BALANCE: CITY OF NEW YORK	2,770,640	1,482,719	53.5%	1,885,776	674,894	35.8%
CITY OF NEW YORK	3,597,547	1,951,331	54.2%	4,141,321	2,323,895	56.1%
Bergen County, New Jersey	438,229	56,004	12.8%	446,219	28,642	6.4%
Essex County, New Jersey	342,695	66,358	19.4%	369,487	44,441	12.0%
Hudson County, New Jersey	294,730	109,394	37.1%	262,226	64,015	24.4%
Middlesex County, New Jersey	383,780	38,654	10.1%	368,680	12,450	3.4%
Nassau County, New York	626,878	104,533	16.7%	562,481	41,253	7.3%
Union County, New Jersey	247,329	21,686	8.8%	247,718	14,112	5.7%
Westchester County, New York	431,947	89,485	20.7%	430,330	45,994	10.7%
	2,765,588	486,114	17.6%	2,687,141	250,907	9.3%
Dutchess County, New York	141,011	8,498	6.0%	125,714	2,843	2.3%
Fairfield County, Connecticut	429,346	38,411	8.9%	451,191	22,563	5.0%
Hunterdon County, New Jersey	66,335	2,053	3.1%	59,459	567	1.0%
Litchfield County, Connecticut	97,662	1,292	1.3%			
Mercer County, New Jersey	171,453	12,954	7.6%	216,722	7,970	3.7%
Monmouth County, New Jersey	308,135	27,589	9.0%	278,658	5,972	2.1%
Morris County, New Jersey	247,415	9,856	4.0%	287,047	4,247	1.5%
New Haven County, Connecticut	407,795	13,886	3.4%	376,304	10,587	2.8%
Ocean County, New Jersey	238,032	3,667	1.5%	165,281	1,308	0.8%
Orange County, New York	172,278	7,033	4.1%	145,660	1,972	1.4%
Passaic County, New Jersey	225,420	19,852	8.8%	186,565	11,690	6.3%
Putnam County, New York						
Rockland County, New York	132,815	11,486	8.6%	113,316	3,547	3.1%
Somerset County, New Jersey	162,003	9,424	5.8%	174,393	2,608	1.5%
Suffolk County, New York	698,074	41,043	5.9%	606,490	10,981	1.8%
Sussex County, New Jersey	80,168	1,278	1.6%			
Ulster County, New York	88,834	1,192	1.3%	73,015	467	0.6%
Warren County, New Jersey	56,312	997	1.8%			
	3,723,088	210,511	5.7%	3,259,815	87,322	2.7%
NEW YORK CONSOLIDATED AREA	10,086,223	2,647,956	26.3%	10,088,277	2,662,124	26.4%

Calculated from American Community Survey (2006)  
Blank spaces indicate no data

## Work Trip Travel Time: by Residence NEW YORK METROPOLITAN AREA: 2006

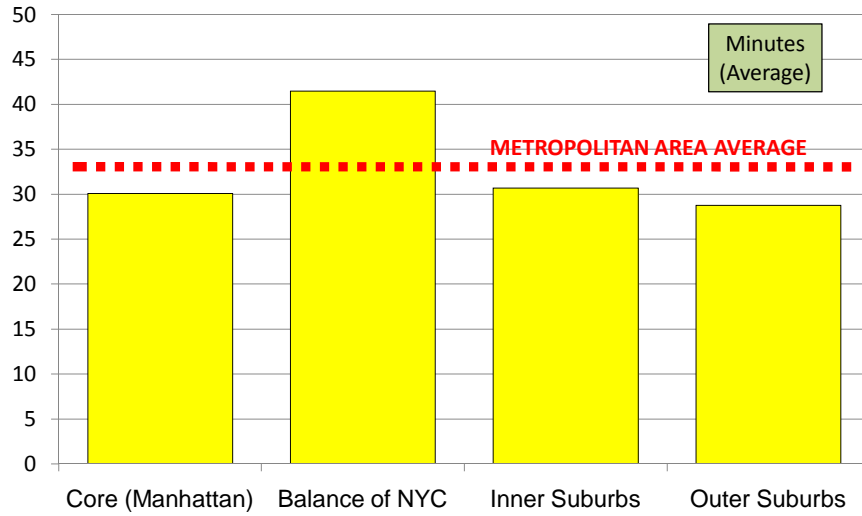


Figure 1

## Work Trip Travel Time: Work Location NEW YORK METROPOLITAN AREA: 2006

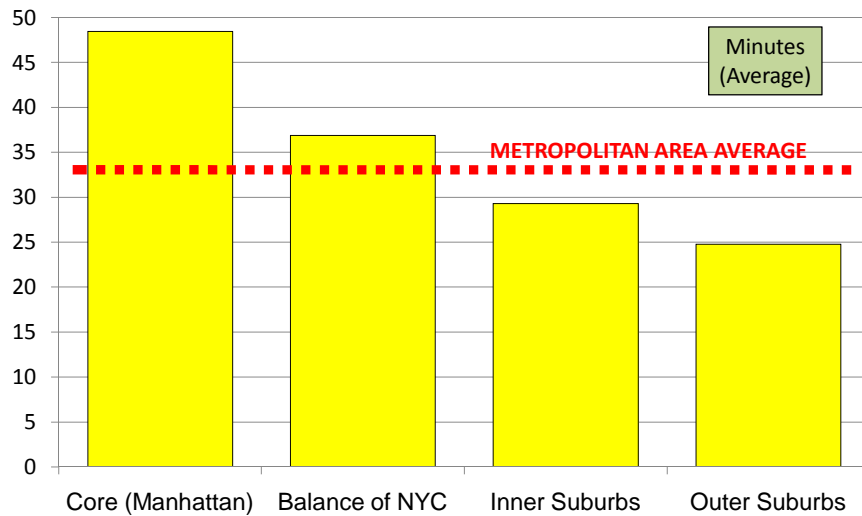


Figure 2



## Jobs-Housing Balance NEW YORK METROPOLITAN AREA: 2006

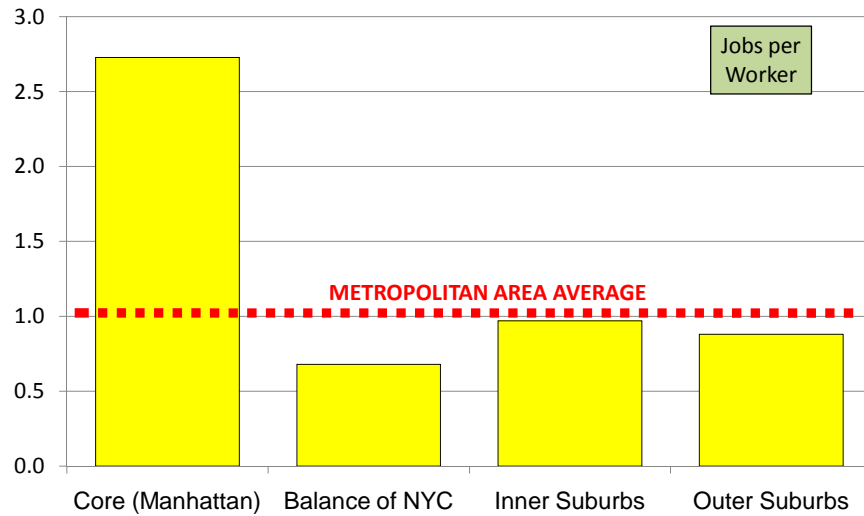


Figure 3

## Transit Work Trip Share: by Residence NEW YORK METROPOLITAN AREA: 2006

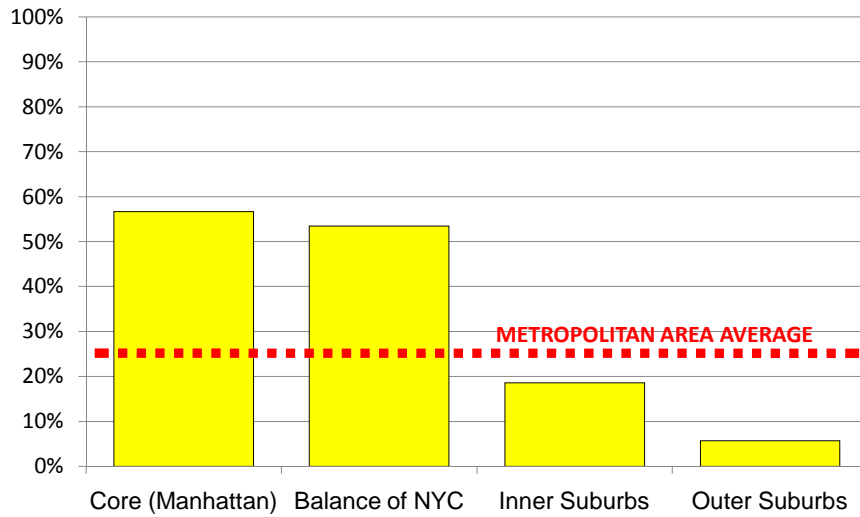


Figure 4

## Transit Work Trip Share: Work Location NEW YORK METROPOLITAN AREA: 2006

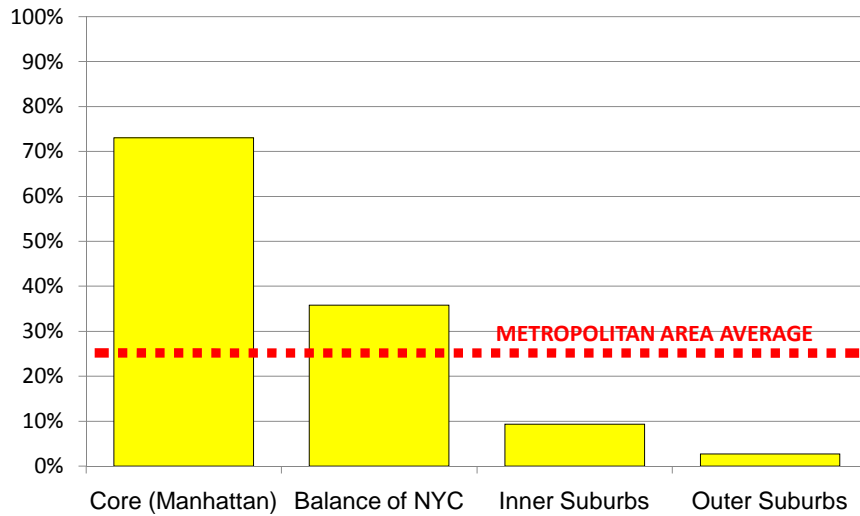


Figure 5

## Employment Density NEW YORK METROPOLITAN AREA: 2006

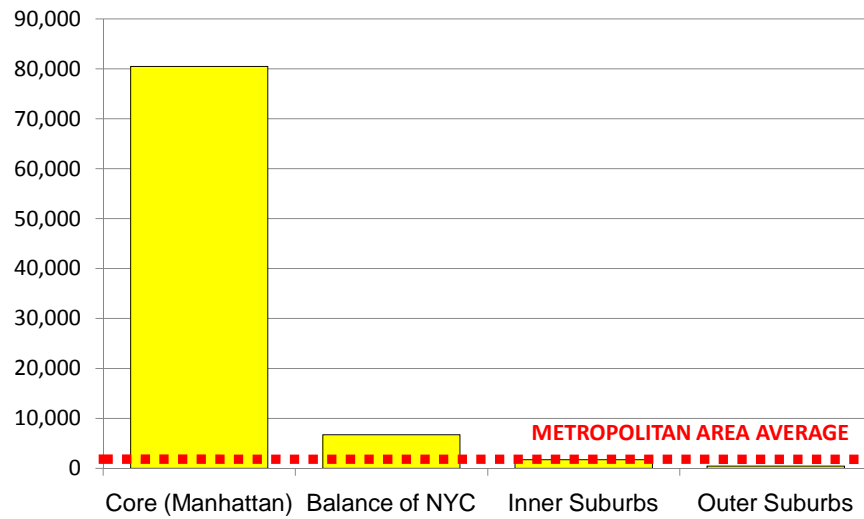


Figure 6

# Distribution of Employment

## NEW YORK METROPOLITAN AREA: 2006

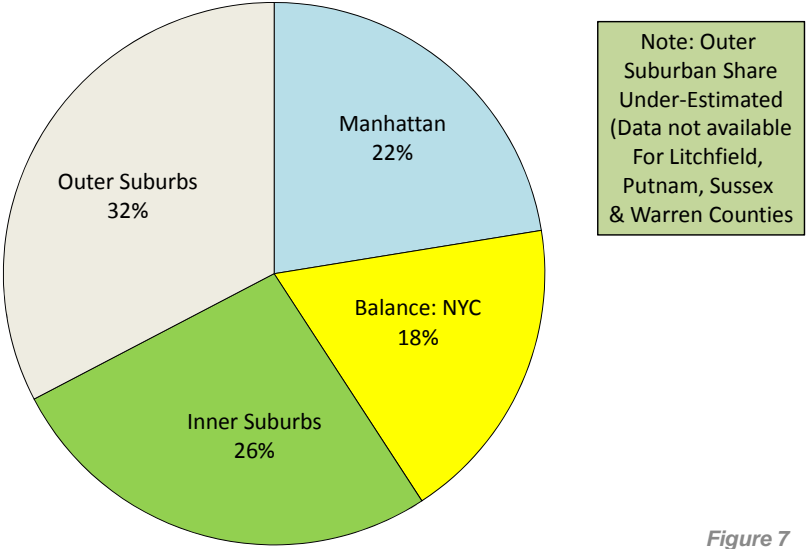


Figure 7