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Chicago youth jobs report highlights need for better public transit

By Madeline Kenney

A new report on youth unemployment in Chicago, scheduled to be released Monday, finds that areas plagued by high unemployment rates are the same neighborhoods that have fewer nearby job opportunities for residents and also need better public transportation to the Loop.

The Great Cities Institute at the University of Illinois at Chicago identified some specific communities on the Southwest and South Sides that have higher youth unemployment rates than some of the city's North Side neighborhoods.

Youth employment numbers are up since 2010. Among 16-to-19-year-olds, the employment rate increased to 18.7 percent from 16.5 percent.

But the majority of the city's jobs are in the Loop and Northwest Side, putting residents of the South and West sides at a disadvantage, according to the study.

Researchers found that the South and West sides have, on average, less than 50,000 accessible jobs per neighborhood. The study defines an "accessible" job as one within walking distance or no more than 30 minutes away on public transit.

Theresa Cordova, the research director for the report, said that mismatch between where jobs are located and the transportation needed to get to those jobs is key.

"It's bringing more jobs into the neighborhoods and also improving public transportation," said Cordova, who is also a professor of urban planning and policy at UIC. "People need to get to and from those jobs — expand the CTA to meet those needs. . . . As good as the CTA is, it's not elite."

In September, transit officials released details about a long dreamed of \$2.3 billion plan to extend the CTA's Red Line from 95th Street to 130th Street, which could address that problem. The expansion would give residents who live south of 95th, the current Red Line endpoint, more access to the Loop. But the earliest construction could start on the project is 2022, the CTA said at the time.

Other than job concentration correlating with unemployment rates, the report also reiterated the connection between education level, job prospects and income. People without a high school diploma are two times more likely to be unemployed



A new study finds that access to public transportation is key to addressing youth employment — and that there are fewer jobs for residents of the city's South and West sides that are within walking distance or can be reached in half an hour on public transit. | Sun-Times photo

compared to someone with a bachelor's degree.

A person who drops out of high school makes on average \$504 per week, while a person who holds a bachelor's degree makes on average \$1,156 per week, according to the study. The study found that Cook County has nearly half — 45 percent — of all 20 to 24-year-olds in the state who are out of school, out of work and who have no high school diploma.

For the full report, *The High Costs for Out of School and Jobless Youth in Chicago and Cook County*, by the University of Illinois at Chicago Great Cities Institute [click here](#).