

# Transportation

Strategies to overcome obstacles keeping adults out of the workforce.



## 227,000

FAMILIES IN WEST MICHIGAN LIVE BELOW A SURVIVAL-LEVEL BUDGET

AVERAGE MONTHLY COST TO OWN A VEHICLE IS

## \$409

AN ESTIMATED

## 400

WORKERS USE THE WHEELS TO WORK PROGRAM FOR ABOUT

## 7,000

RIDES PER MONTH

## The Barrier

A lack of access to reliable, affordable transportation keeps many potential employees out of the workforce and contributes to job tardiness, absenteeism, lost productivity, and turnover.

- The United Way calculates 227,000 (or 2 out of 5) families in West Michigan live below a survival-level budget. These working poor, one crisis away from poverty, cannot afford the estimated \$409 per-month cost of owning, insuring, and maintaining a vehicle.
- Unexpected repairs are disruptive and especially costly for workers with no savings. For someone making \$10.50 an hour, replacing a single flat tire can cost almost a full day of take-home pay.
- Public transportation is considerably cheaper than private transportation — an adult worker could ride the bus for five days a week at a cost of no more than \$70 per month. But public transportation is not universally available in West Michigan. Even in places where bus transportation is available, some routes end a mile or more from the place of business, leaving workers to walk or bike the remaining distance in all weather, and all times of day or night.
- Tardiness and absenteeism results in job loss. Turnover is estimated to cost employers upwards of \$3,500 for each entry-level position.

## Leading Practices

Hope Network's *Wheels To Work* program offers a model to bridge transportation gaps to benefit workers and employers.

- *Wheels To Work* is a hub-based transit program that allows employers and employees to share the cost of transportation to the workplace.
- The program operates 7 days a week, 365 days a year, and covers all three shifts.
- *Wheels To Work* is being used by 22 employers, mostly in Kent County, serving a fraction of the 29,000 business establishments in West Michigan.
- An estimated 400 workers are using the program for about 7,000 rides per month. Hope Network has capacity to double those numbers.
- On average, employees utilize the *Wheels To Work* program for 3-6 months before establishing alternative permanent methods of transportation.
- Many business leaders are unaware of the program. An increase in the number of employers using it would benefit businesses, their workforce, and applicants.

## Recommendations and Strategies

*Wheels To Work* can be promoted to Talent 2025's member employers and community partners in Kent County, and expanded to communities and employers beyond Kent County.

- Connect Kent County employers with Hope Network to discuss *Wheels To Work*.
- Partner with Hope Network, which operates in every Michigan county, to identify likely areas of expansion of *Wheels To Work* or similar program.
- Enlist 5 to 10 employers to pilot and assess a program modeled on *Wheels To Work*.



After using data to identify four barriers to employment, the Workforce Development Working Group wanted to put a face to our research and test our insights. This persona project, compiled from interviews and the data, confirmed our research and insights, and gives us a clearer view of how barriers impact real people.

## Joe's Story

### A will to work, no way to get there.

"Joe" gets by working odd jobs like cutting trees and stacking firewood. That work barely puts food on the table.

His primary means of transportation is by bike, sometimes riding 22 miles round-trip. He would prefer to drive his van, but he can't afford the insurance and has not been able to save the money to repair the transmission. The van is in such poor repair that when he does drive it, it uses more gas than he can afford.

He is part of the 39.2 percent of West Michigan families living below what the United Way describes as a survival budget, leaving them unable to afford costs of basic necessities such as housing, child care, food, health care, and transportation.

Joe wants steady employment. He just needs a way to get there.

He recently drove to an interview without insurance because he knew the bus would not get him to the appointment in time and he did not want to be late. Sometimes he will catch a ride from a cousin, but he doesn't like to ask favors.

Joe is determined to work hard when he lands a job. He has been working with a caseworker to improve his resume and interviewing skills. Once he lands a job, he is not worried about getting up early to catch the bus. "It's heartbreaking not to work," he says.



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Learn about other barriers in this series, and strategies for overcoming them.

- [Child Care](#)
- [Education and Skills](#)
- [Substance Use](#)

[Read the full report on Transportation here.](#)