

New Jersey Department of Transportation  
Bureau of Research

## Technical Brief



### **The Impact of Demographic Changes on Transit Patterns in New Jersey**

*Forty percent of New Jersey's foreign-born population use transit. This study investigates how this population decides where live, where to work, and how to travel, and the impact of changes upon future transit ridership. Recommendations are made for transit policy decisions.*

#### **Background**

Twenty percent of New Jersey's population is foreign-born. Those born in India, the Philippines, and Latin America are the largest segments of this group. We investigated how work and non-work travel are affected by spatial characteristics at home and work, occupations and industries of immigrants, length of residency, and transit access.

In particular, this study investigated why immigrants rely on transit for fewer and fewer trips the longer they live in the US. Wealthier, more educated immigrants have different transit use patterns than poorer and less educated immigrants, but all immigrant groups use transit at an average higher rate than the US-born.

#### **Research Objectives and Approach**

We addressed two main questions:

- What factors contribute to higher transit use among first generation immigrants (foreign-born residents) and their descendants (second generation) in comparison to US-born residents?
- Why does transit use change with each generation of immigrants?

In order to gather data to answer these questions, we examined US Census data, conducted six focus groups, and carried out a telephone survey of about a 900 households, most of whom were born outside the US.



## Findings

- Immigrants living in New Jersey initially use transit more than the US-born due to their focus on being near employment and educational institutions, the original reasons they immigrated to the US. Some also prioritize access to home-country social networks that are concentrated in areas with high transit accessibility.
- Immigrant rail riders exhibit similar usage patterns as their US-born brethren, in that their commuting patterns are largely explained by their demographic and spatial characteristics. However immigrants commute by bus more than the native-born even when controlling for those characteristics.
- Residents born in Latin America are more likely to use transit for non-work trips as well as private shared transportation modes—a new and fast-growing transportation sector. Indian-born residents tend to hold jobs near rail stops while those born in Latin America tend to have poor transit accessibility near their places of work.
- If immigration to New Jersey decreases and the current declining trend in immigrant transit behavior continues, than continued increases in transit usage are not likely in the future.
- However, there may be policies that could reduce the dropoff of immigrant transit use and help capture New Jersey's share of future immigration on which the regional economy partly depends. The full research report suggests changes to current transit to encourage and retain transit ridership by immigrants.

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A final report is available online at: <http://www.state.nj.us/transportation/refdata/research/>. If you would like a copy of the full report, send an e-mail to: [Research.Bureau@dot.state.nj.us](mailto:Research.Bureau@dot.state.nj.us).

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