



Status Report



U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Highway Administration
AASHTO Committee on Planning



TRB Census Subcommittee
Bureau of Transportation Statistics
Federal Transit Administration

What’s Happening in the World of ACTS and CTPP

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As highlighted in the Fall 2024 edition of this newsletter, our long-standing program name “Census Transportation Planning Products Program” has changed as part of a rebranding effort at the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO). Our program is now known as AASHTO Census Transportation Solutions (ACTS). While the AASHTO program is now called ACTS, the data set will still be called CTPP.

Progress continues on developing the next ACTS/CTPP data package based on 2017-2021 American Community Survey (ACS) data. Work on producing the 2017-2021 CTPP tables is underway, with the Part 1 Tabulation (residence) available to AASHTO in the next few months. It is still anticipated that CTPP Parts 2-3 (workplace, flows) should be available by the end of 2024. Progress is also nearing completion on new CTPP data access software, including the application program interface (API). A solicitation has gone to the State DOTs to participate in the 2025-2029 ACTS program. The new program will provide training, technical assistance, user support and data, explicitly the next set of five-year CTPP tables based on 2022-2026 ACS.

At the same time, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) recently completed updating their Census Issues website (https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/census_issues/). A review of every link on this site was completed to identify necessary updates and these modifications were made. Please contact Rob Schiffer (rob@metroanalytics.com) or Joe Hausman (Joseph.Hausman@dot.gov) if you see anything on the FHWA Census site that still requires updating. Once the 2017-2021 CTPP data are available, work should begin on a restructuring of the FHWA CTPP Profiles. This newsletter will provide some highlights from the Fall 2023 ACTS Board meeting, a summary of presentations from the 2024 TRB Census Data Subcommittee meeting, recent trends in commuter travel times and transit use, and an article on recent changes to the ACS regarding travel modes.

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Recap of ACTS Oversight Board Fall 2023 Quarterly Meeting

Rob Schiffer, Metro Analytics, rob@metroanalytics.com

The ACTS Oversight Board met in Reno, NV on October 4-5, 2023, to chart a future course for the ACTS and discuss a multitude of issues related to data procurement, new CTPP software tools, subcommittee activities, board composition, and funding. Budgeting was a key emphasis at this particular meeting as the current five-year funding cycle is ending in June 2024. Just like everything else, the costs of data procurement are increasing and participation from State Departments of Transportation is crucial to ACTS funding.

An update was provided on the new CTPP access software under development, including a live demonstration of the data portal structure. The draft data portal includes query components for data extraction, result display and customization, visualization, management functions (downloading, saving, sharing), and the forthcoming application programming interface (API). Board members had an opportunity to ask questions and suggest modifications. Topics discussed included margins of error, confidence intervals, and feedback opportunities for users of the new software. A subsequent webinar was held for a more thorough demonstration with Board members.

The Oversight Board includes several subcommittees and each of these provided an update. The first of these was the Table Subcommittee, whose members are responsible for shepherding along the CTPP tables that are regularly downloaded by transportation professionals throughout the U.S. The official interagency agreement between AASHTO and the U.S. Census Bureau was signed in July 2023 for the 2017-2021 CTPP tables. Research Topics have emerged by partnering with Census including quantifying the effects of perturbation on the resulting 2017-2021 dataset; improvements to workplace geocoding; and synthetic data options. The Table Subcommittee is also interested in developing practical applications of CTPP data in MPO travel models and related activities, as a means of increasing awareness of how CTPP can be used by MPOs. Next up was the Research Subcommittee, who reconfirmed support for much of what the Table Subcommittee is striving to achieve. The Research Subcommittee has helped spearhead the *NCHRP Census Transportation Data Field Guide for Transportation Applications*, which is now nearing completion. Further discussion led to the Training and Outreach subcommittee to be split into two separate subcommittees.

As the American Community Survey (ACS) is the backbone on which CTPP data is built, Census Bureau staff led a discussion on the ACS. First off, it was noted that ACS content change/review is a very long process, with the next round starting in about 2024-2025. The Bureau is testing a new means of transportation that includes “multi-modal” instead of “primary mode of transportation” with each respondent specifying which modes are being used if the multimodal option is selected. The Bureau is also testing content on the use of “work from home” as a category label. In 2024, the ACS “taxi” category label is changing to “taxi and ride hailing services.” ACS 2016-2020 data on county flows are available and published now.

Next was a discussion on a planned “facelift” of Commuting in America (CIA), an annual 15-page AASHTO report that is derived from CTPP analytics. Considerations underway include reducing the length of narrative found in current reports; making CIA reporting more dynamic and visual with a focus largely on how dynamics are changing over time; standardizing reports to build efficiency; including video guides to supplement text; and potentially using artificial intelligence to document the CIA.

The remainder of the meeting was largely devoted to reviewing the mission and charge of the ACTS and its board. There was discussion on a future data repository framework and brainstorming for the ACTS Strategic Plan, data governance, data sharing, consistency, duplication, and data storage. Prominent topics also included future research, training, data literacy and outreach to other relevant national organizations. Board membership was expanded to include transit agency representation. Promotional materials will be developed for additional recruitment to and involvement in the program.

Topics from the 2024 TRB Meeting of the AED20(1) Census Data for Transportation Planning Subcommittee

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The TRB Census Data for Transportation Planning Subcommittee Meeting (AED20(1)) held its annual meeting in a virtual format, after the TRB Annual Meeting. Presentations included the following:

- *2020 Census Disclosure Avoidance System Briefs* – Matt Spence, U.S. Census Bureau
- *ACS Data Product Updates and ACS Content Changes (Planned)* – Charlynn Burd, U.S. Census
- *AASHTO, ACTS/CTPP, and Commuting in America Updates* – Penelope Weinberger, AASHTO
- *Investigation of Commute Equity Using Machine Learning Techniques* – Zeinab Bandpey, Morgan State University (Commuting in America Brief)
- *New FHWA CTPP Profile Interface* – Rob Schiffer, Metro Analytics

To learn more, please go to the subcommittee website to view or download these presentations:

<https://transportation.org/ctpp/trb-aed201-subcommittee-census-data-for-transportation-planning/>

Proposed Changes to the 2025 American Community Survey

Update from American Community Survey Data Users Group

In October, the Census Bureau published a Federal Register notice inviting the public to comment on proposed changes to the survey covering several topics, including household roster, educational attainment, health insurance coverage, disability, and labor force questions:

https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/10/20/2023-23249/agency-information-collection-activities-submission-to-the-office-of-management-and-budget-omb-for?utm_campaign=&utm_content=&utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery

The proposal also included the addition of three new topics on electric vehicles, sewage disposal, and solar panels. The Census Bureau received more than 12,000 comments, which were posted to <https://www.regulations.gov/docket/USBC-2023-0009>.

Recent Trends in Commuter Travel Times and Public Transit Use

Rob Schiffer, Metro Analytics, rob@metroanalytics.com

Everyone knows that commuter travel has changed since the 2020 pandemic but what does the American Community Survey (ACS) tell us about recent trends in this regard? At the suggestion of Guy Rousseau, of the Atlanta Regional Commission and Vice Chair of the ACTS Oversight Board, an assessment was conducted on mean travel times to work and percent public transit use for the years 2019 to 2022 using ACS data. ACS data were compiled for the same 20 large U.S. Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) referenced in a recent article in The New York Times (NYT) that touched on this topic. The article, titled "*Most Americans still have to commute every day. Here's how that experience has changed*" referenced analysis from Replica (<https://www.replicahq.com/>). The article can be viewed with a NYT account at

https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2023/11/06/business/economy/commuting-change-covid.html?unlocked_article_code=1.8kw.YoKs.IvGIW47584-M&smid=url-share.

As depicted in Table 1 below, mean travel times in the U.S. decreased by 4.3 percent over the period 2019-2022, according to the ACS and decreased in all 20 of the MSAs included in the analysis. The average decrease for this group of MSAs was -6.3 percent, with a median decrease of -5.7 percent. ACS data shows that decreases ranged from a high of -14.2 percent in the San Francisco-Oakland MSA to a low of -2.6 percent in the Miami-Fort Lauderdale MSA. One could surmise that the large change in the former could be due to the large number of tech workers in the region while the low percentages in the latter are the result of an economy focused on tourism and a significant number of retirees. While percentage decreases reported in the NYT article differed for some of the MSAs, the mean and median of the 20 areas was similar to the ACS, at -6.0 and -6.1 percent, respectively.

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Table 1. Mean Travel Time to Work Comparisons

Metropolitan Statistical Area	American Community Survey ¹				
	Mean travel time to work (minutes)				2019-22
	2019	2020	2021	2022	%Change
U.S. National Averages	27.6	26.9	25.6	26.4	-4.3%
Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Alpharetta, GA Metro Area	32.5	32.1	29.6	30.9	-4.9%
Austin-Round Rock-Georgetown, TX Metro Area	27.7	27.4	26.1	26.4	-4.7%
Boston-Cambridge-Newton	32.6	31.5	28.4	30.1	-7.7%
Charlotte-Concord-Gastonia, NC-SC Metro Area	27.7	27.1	25.7	26.3	-5.1%
Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN-WI Metro Area	32.4	31.8	29.0	30.2	-6.8%
Columbus, OH	25.0	24.1	23.7	23.5	-6.0%
Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX Metro Area	28.6	28.4	27.3	27.7	-3.1%
Denver-Aurora-Lakewood, CO Metro Area	28.8	27.8	26.7	26.8	-6.9%
Detroit-Warren-Dearborn, MI Metro Area	27.5	27.0	25.4	26.0	-5.5%
Houston-The Woodlands-Sugar Land, TX Metro Area	30.7	30.0	28.9	30.0	-2.3%
Kansas City	23.9	23.5	23.0	22.8	-4.6%
Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA Metro Area	31.7	30.8	28.4	29.2	-7.9%
Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach, FL Metro Area	30.3	29.9	28.3	29.5	-2.6%
Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, MN-WI Metro Area	26.1	25.6	23.3	24.0	-8.0%
Nashville-Davidson--Murfreesboro--Franklin, TN Metro Area	28.5	28.1	26.2	27.1	-4.9%
New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ-PA Metro Area	37.7	37.0	34.2	35.8	-5.0%
Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington, PA-NJ-DE-MD Metro Area	30.8	30.1	27.6	28.6	-7.1%
San Francisco-Oakland-Berkeley	35.2	34.1	28.8	30.2	-14.2%
Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue, WA Metro Area	31.6	31.0	28.5	28.5	-9.8%
Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV Metro Area	35.6	34.8	31.0	32.3	-9.3%
<i>Overall MSA Averages</i>	<i>30.2</i>	<i>29.6</i>	<i>27.5</i>	<i>28.3</i>	<i>-6.3%</i>
<i>Overall MSA Median Values</i>	<i>30.5</i>	<i>30.0</i>	<i>28.0</i>	<i>28.6</i>	<i>-5.7%</i>

¹2019-2022 ACS: Means of Transportation to Work by Selected Characteristics Table S0802

<https://data.census.gov/table?q=means%20of%20transportation>

A similar ACS analysis was conducted on the use of public transportation for work commutes. Table 2 below illustrates that the percentage of transit trips for work commutes dropped substantially over the same period of 2019-2022. According to ACS, there was a 38 percent drop in public transportation use for work trips. Interestingly, the same two MSAs show up as the minimum and maximum percentage change here. Percentage reductions in transit use for work trips range from a maximum of -58.7 percent in the San Francisco-Oakland MSA to a low of -17.2 percent in the Miami-Fort Lauderdale MSA. The previously referenced NYT article indicated a much sharper drop in transit trips than ACS, with an average reduction of -17.2 percent according to ACS vs. -25 percent in the article. Median reductions for these same 20 MSAs were -58.7 percent in the ACS vs. -91 percent in the NYT article.

Table 2. Percent Transit Work Trip Comparisons

Metropolitan Statistical Area	American Community Survey ²				
	% Public transportation (excluding taxicab)				2019-22
	2019	2020	2021	2022	%Change
U.S. National Averages	5.0%	1.3%	2.5%	3.1%	-38.0%
Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Alpharetta, GA Metro Area	2.8%	2.8%	1.0%	1.4%	-50.0%
Austin-Round Rock-Georgetown, TX Metro Area	1.9%	1.7%	0.7%	1.1%	-42.1%
Boston-Cambridge-Newton	13.4%	12.3%	5.6%	8.0%	-40.3%
Charlotte-Concord-Gastonia, NC-SC Metro Area	1.6%	1.4%	0.7%	0.8%	-50.0%
Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN-WI Metro Area	12.4%	11.3%	4.8%	7.0%	-43.5%
Columbus, OH	1.7%	1.5%	0.9%	1.2%	-29.4%
Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX Metro Area	1.1%	1.2%	1.3%	0.6%	-45.5%
Denver-Aurora-Lakewood, CO Metro Area	4.5%	3.8%	1.7%	2.2%	-51.1%
Detroit-Warren-Dearborn, MI Metro Area	1.4%	1.3%	0.9%	0.8%	-42.9%
Houston-The Woodlands-Sugar Land, TX Metro Area	2.0%	1.9%	1.3%	1.4%	-30.0%
Kansas City	0.8%	0.8%	0.5%	0.5%	-37.5%
Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA Metro Area	4.8%	4.5%	2.8%	3.1%	-35.4%
Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach, FL Metro Area	2.9%	3.0%	2.0%	2.4%	-17.2%
Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, MN-WI Metro Area	4.5%	4.2%	1.7%	2.0%	-55.6%
Nashville-Davidson--Murfreesboro--Franklin, TN Metro Area	1.1%	0.9%	0.6%	0.7%	-36.4%
New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ-PA Metro Area	31.6%	29.8%	19.0%	23.8%	-24.7%
Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington, PA-NJ-DE-MD Metro Area	9.4%	8.8%	4.7%	5.7%	-39.4%
San Francisco-Oakland-Berkeley	18.9%	16.0%	4.9%	7.8%	-58.7%
Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue, WA Metro Area	10.7%	9.1%	3.0%	4.6%	-57.0%
Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV Metro Area	13.1%	12.0%	4.1%	6.0%	-54.2%
<i>Overall MSA Averages</i>	<i>7.0%</i>	<i>6.4%</i>	<i>3.1%</i>	<i>4.1%</i>	<i>-42.0%</i>
<i>Overall MSA Median Values</i>	<i>3.7%</i>	<i>3.4%</i>	<i>1.7%</i>	<i>2.1%</i>	<i>-42.5%</i>

²2019-2022 ACS Table S0101: Commuting Characteristics by Sex

<https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2022.S0101>

In sum, both sources of data referenced in this article show a marked decrease in the mean travel time to work and an even more significant decrease in percent transit ridership for work trips over the period 2019-2022. That said, most MSAs show an increase in work trip lengths in 2022, when compared to 2021. A similar rebound in the percentage of transit work trips in the 2021-2022 period. Once available, it will be interesting to see if the 2023 ACS shows a continued rebound in trip lengths and percent transit trips over 2022 and 2021 or if the numbers largely stabilize (or even decrease). Monitoring these trends could be important to understanding the long-term ramifications of shifting travel patterns.

ACS Responds to Its Users: Additional Travel Modes Added

By Ed Christopher, Consultant, edc@berwyned.com

Twenty years ago the Houston METRO Rail’s Main Street Light Rail, now known as the Red line, opened. It was an overwhelming success, hitting and exceeding its ridership projections for years to come. Unfortunately, the success that this system was having was not showing up in the newly minted ACS data products. Something was off. Could it be that the people who used “Light Rail” didn’t know how to respond since light rail was not a response choice on the ACS questionnaire?

Fast forward twenty years to 2024 and you will find a Light Rail category on the ACS questionnaire. In fact, 2024 will mark the first year that we will begin to get 5-year ACS data with the new Light Rail category. It was added in 2019. If you are in a light rail area feel free to let the “*Status Report*” know how the data looks.

Besides being the 20th anniversary for the Houston Red Line, January 1, 2024, also marked the introduction of another mode to the ACS’s Means of Transportation (MOT) question, “ride-hailing

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services". It is paired with Taxi which was shortened from "Taxicab". Although subtle, these changes should help people respond and tighten up some of the mode ambiguity. Shown in the graphic is the 2024 MOT question. A full copy of the 2024 questionnaire can be found at <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/methodology/questionnaires/2024/quest24.pdf>

32 How did this person usually get to work LAST WEEK? Mark (X) ONE box for the method of transportation used for most of the distance.

<input type="checkbox"/> Car, truck, or van	<input type="checkbox"/> Taxi or ride-hailing services
<input type="checkbox"/> Bus	<input type="checkbox"/> Motorcycle
<input type="checkbox"/> Subway or elevated rail	<input type="checkbox"/> Bicycle
<input type="checkbox"/> Long-distance train or commuter rail	<input type="checkbox"/> Walked
<input type="checkbox"/> Light rail, streetcar, or trolley	<input type="checkbox"/> Worked from home → SKIP to question 40a
<input type="checkbox"/> Ferryboat	<input type="checkbox"/> Other method

Source: U.S. Census Bureau Online ACS Questionnaire

Wondering how a question gets added to the ACS?

It's a whole process, but the good thing to know is that ACTS has a built in relationship with the responsible federal agencies working on changes. Clara Reschovsky (clara.reschovsky@dot.gov) from BTS and a non-voting member of the ACTS Board, sits on the Federal committee that discusses this stuff. To learn more on how a question gets added to the ACS, please see:

<https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/2017/comm/acs-questions.html>

To suggest a change feel free to contact Ms. Reschovsky.

Other ACS Changes

In 2025, according to Ms. Reschovsky, we should be anticipating a question on electric and plug-in hybrid electric vehicles that received its final recommendation with the Content Test Report published in November 2023:

https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2023/acs/2023_Cromwell_02.pdf

Several other tweaks to ACS to keep your eyes on include all the work going on around the exploration and use of Administrative Data with the ACS. In a report published last September, the Bureau discussed several applications, each of which would have its own methodological implications. Areas where Administrative records are getting looked at include:

- Allocation and imputation for sex, age, citizenship, race, and Hispanic origin
- Full or partial removal of the agricultural sales question
- Full or partial removal of housing characteristics questions
- Evaluation of nonresponse bias in survey response data and other data quality checks
- Modeled estimates for income

For more on this, see Agility in action 4.0: Responding and adapting to Our Evolving Nation on this page:

<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/methodology/agility-in-action.html>

ACTS/CTPP Contact List

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2012-2016 CTPP Data: <https://ctpp.transportation.org/2012-2016-5-year-ctpp/>
FHWA CTPP website: https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/census_issues/ctpp/
FHWA website for Census issues: https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/census_issues
AASHTO website for CTPP: <https://ctpp.transportation.org>
1990 and 2000 CTPP data downloadable via Transtats: <https://transtats.bts.gov/>
TRB Subcommittee on census data: <https://ctpp.transportation.org/trb-aed201/>
American Community Survey (ACS) Data Users Group: <https://acsdatacommunity.prb.org/>

CTPP Listserv

The CTPP Listserv serves as a web-forum for posting questions and sharing information on Census and ACS. Currently, more than 700 users are subscribed to the listserv. To subscribe, please register by completing a form posted at:

<https://listserv.transportation.org/mailman3/lists/ctpp.listserv.transportation.org/>

On the form, you can indicate if you want emails to be batched in a daily digest. The website also includes an archive of past emails posted to the listserv.

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