

The Impact of Microtransit on Upward Economic Mobility

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Abstract

A growing body of research demonstrates that economic mobility is shaped not only by individual characteristics but also by local conditions that influence access to opportunity. Seminal work by Chetty and coauthors (e.g., Chetty et al., 2014; Chetty et al., 2022) emphasizes the central role of *economic connectedness*—the extent to which individuals are linked to employment, education, and social networks—in determining upward mobility. While this literature has substantially advanced our understanding of place-based mobility, it has paid comparatively little attention to the role of transportation systems in shaping these connections.

This paper examines how transportation infrastructure, and microtransit in particular, affects economic mobility by altering access to jobs, goods, and services. I study the town of Wilson, North Carolina, which replaced its traditional fixed-route bus system with an on-demand microtransit service several years ago. Using resident-level survey and administrative data, I analyze outcomes among individuals who switched from the former bus system to microtransit, focusing on transportation times, stress levels, job access, and employment opportunities.

The results indicate that microtransit significantly reduces travel times and perceived transportation stress while expanding access to employment, retail, and educational institutions. These changes suggest that microtransit can strengthen economic connectedness in ways not captured by existing measures of neighborhood effects. By explicitly incorporating transportation into the analysis of economic mobility, this paper extends the Chetty framework and related work on spatial mismatch, job accessibility, and urban transportation (e.g., Kain, 1968; Blumenberg and Pierce, 2014). The findings highlight microtransit as a potentially important policy lever for improving economic mobility in small and mid-sized communities.