



Civic Caucus Members Paul Gilje and Clarence Shallbetter

Getting to work in the metro area: nothing to it for many; big obstacle for some.

A Civic Caucus Focus on Competitiveness Interview

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Present

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Summary

Some, mainly low-income, people experience enormous difficulty in arranging trips between home and work. That they struggle with such difficulty is completely unapparent to many who never give the work trip a second thought, simply because for them getting to and from work is so easy. Those more fortunate workers open the doors to their attached garages, hop in their cars, and drive directly to a parking lot next to their jobs. Or they walk to a nearby transit stop and are delivered within easy walking distance of their jobs. However, because homes and jobs are so widely dispersed in the metro area (about 80 percent of jobs are in the suburbs), neither of those choices is readily available to significant numbers of less privileged workers.

No one, least of all lower-income persons, should be penalized in seeking or accepting jobs in the Twin Cities area simply because they don't have ready access to transportation. Many options are available to help, including better use of now-empty passenger seats in cars on the freeway every day. Action to alleviate such transportation problems will help the state solve a shortage in human capital, help employers broaden their pool of qualified job applicants, and combat poverty by making living wage jobs more accessible.

Biography

Today's interviewees are **Clarence Shallbetter** and **Paul Gilje**, themselves members of the Civic Caucus interview group. Both have worked on transportation policy in previous occupations. Shallbetter, currently a deacon of the Catholic Church, previously was employed by the Citizens League, the Metropolitan Council, and the Minnesota House of Representatives. Gilje formerly was employed by the Citizens League. Today they are discussing an important relationship between the recent Civic Caucus [statement on human capital](#) and the importance of the daily work trip to employers and employees alike.

Discussion

Helping to solve the work trip problem will help to maintain Minnesota's strength in human capital. Shallbetter opened the discussion by highlighting the main point in the recent Civic Caucus [statement on human capital](#) : that the state faces a significant decline in persons of working age, with more baby-boomers retiring than younger people coming into the work force. Helping to alleviate transportation obstacles for under-employed and unemployed persons will help increase the number of potential workers.

Ideally, job seekers, whatever their incomes or home locations in the metro area, should have equitable access to job opportunities in the area. But lower-income persons, particularly those without access to a car, are precluded from even exploring the possibilities for many jobs that are reachable in a reasonable time. A bus or rail line might run nearby, but it's not at all assured that transit will pass close enough to the job site. There is no "level playing field" for those job seekers. Consequently, employers are more limited in their choices of applicants and employees are more limited in their choices of jobs.

The discussion will concern the work trip only, not other transportation questions. Shallbetter emphasized that at this meeting we are addressing only one task: getting people to and from work. While work trips are a small segment (17 percent) of all trips in the metropolitan area, these trips are critical for well being of families and communities. People place an entirely appropriate premium on the amount of time and expense going to and from work.

Today we will not address other important transportation issues such as whether to increase the gas tax or impose freeway tolls. Nor will we touch on air pollution, energy, or congestion, nor address other types of trips, such as shopping or entertainment. Moreover, while denser development can have a small future impact on work trips in the next twenty years, the discussion today focuses on transportation where people already live and work, a pattern that changes very slowly over time. Most home and work locations in this region today will be the bulk of the home and work locations in 2050, Shallbetter predicted.

Twin Cities area homes and job locations are widely dispersed. More than 85 percent

of all jobs in the Twin Cities metro area are located outside the combined locations of downtown Minneapolis, downtown St. Paul, the state Capitol, and the University of Minnesota, Shallbetter and Gilje noted. Of all 1,600,000 jobs in the metro area, about 80 percent are in suburbs. Data sources for today's discussion are the [2010-2011 US Census](#) data, and the 2008-2012 5-year estimates of the

American Community Survey .

Shallbetter and Gilje prepared and distributed a [chart](#) with census data relating directly to the Twin Cities metro area. The data indicate that almost one-half (49.1 percent) of all jobs in the metro area involve a one-way trip of at least 10 miles, with large numbers of jobs found in more than 200 zip codes in the area. This pattern, Shallbetter said, which often places jobs close to parking lots, require long walks from transit stops, if they exist. This means a more personalized form of transportation service or a car is needed to reach most of these jobs in a reasonable time.

Jobs are also widely dispersed for residents of lower income areas. More than 75 percent of workers who live in zip code 55411 (the near north side of Minneapolis) and in zip code 55406 (the east side of St. Paul) work outside the downtowns, the state Capitol and the University of Minnesota. Median family income for those locations is substantially below that of the rest of the metro area.

Personal cars dominate the work trip. More than 77 percent of metro area workers drive alone to work; in suburbs alone the percentage is 81 percent; in central cities, 65 percent; in zip code 55411, 59 percent, and in zip code 55106, 71 percent. Metro-wide carpooling is next in rank at 8.5 percent, followed by transit, 5.3 percent; walking, 2.3 percent; taxicab, motorcycle or other means, 1.8 percent, and working at home, 4.7 percent.

Transit accounts for 11.7 percent of work trips for residents of the central cities; 16.5 percent for residents of zip code 55411, and 7.1 percent, zip code 55106.

Work trip travel patterns today are not much different from 1970s. Shallbetter cited a Citizens League report, "Building Incentives for Drivers to Ride", which in 1973 documented a similar dispersal of trips, calling them "analogous to a ball of yarn, not spokes on a wheel." The report noted that in 1970, not more than one in six workers in the metro area was employed in the two downtowns combined, with an absolute majority employed outside the city limits of the central cities. Also in 1970, more than 87 percent of workers living in the near north side of Minneapolis were employed outside the Minneapolis central business district.

Income disparities probably are more significant today. One change from the 1970s, Shallbetter suggested, is the presence of more disparities in health care, education, and opportunities for livable-wage income producing work. This region needs everyone who is able and lives here to be part of a productive work force. A significant disparity in access to full time livable-wage job opportunities is present in the same areas where there are disparities in education, training and health care, especially for people who don't own cars. Transit does a good job providing a service competitive with the cost of parking to those going to the two downtowns, but that covers fewer than 15 percent of the jobs. The most serious challenge, however, is how to provide a transportation connection service for those seeking the greater job opportunities in the suburbs as well as for similarly situated people who need to make suburb-to-suburb trips.

Solutions: Build on efforts already ongoing or in early stages of development.

Shallbetter and Gilje offered the following possibilities:

- Participate in vanpools, with volunteer drivers, including those sponsored by Metro Transit, <http://www.metrotransit.org/vanpool>, subsidized by the Metropolitan Council. The 3M Company pioneered vanpools in 1973.
- Participate in carpool matching services, including those sponsored by Metro Transit, <http://www.metrotransit.org/carpool>.
- Take advantage of widespread use of smart phones to help match drivers and riders. Such an approach offers potential to match people with common backgrounds and interests, easing fears of accepting rides from, or offering rides to, total strangers. Some internet start-ups already appear on the web.
- Encourage taxi drivers to explore possibilities, and obstacles, to providing home-to-work-and-back trips.
- Build on the experience of providers who serve specialized populations, such as persons with physical challenges, children in special education, or elderly unable to drive, to design services that connect workers with job locations.
- Broaden the offerings of providers who specialize in job training and job placement to include getting the applicant or the employee to and from the work site.
- Explore the potential of programs such as Luft or Uber with cars rentable by the trip door-to-door. Imagine how the service would work if, in future years, driverless cars would be available.

Acknowledge the widespread use of the car for work trips. According to the Census, more than 97 percent of employed workers living in the metro area have at least one car available. While that figure masks the difficulties that lower income people confront, there can be no denying that the car offers significant advantages for work trips, Shallbetter said, particularly when one takes into consideration the time advantage in a non-stop trip and the advantage of add-on trips such as child care trips while going to and coming from work. During the discussion it also was noted that some persons drive because they need to use their cars for other trips unrelated to work during the day.

Acknowledge, too, a bit of "catch-22" for some neighborhoods. As people make more money, one of their first investments is the purchase of a car, Shallbetter noted. If they live in some inner city neighborhoods they may re-locate to the suburbs, which works against improving the neighborhoods. If their neighborhood is attractive and a place they want to live, however, they may decide to stay and travel the average distance others travel to full time jobs in this region.

Some low-income immigrants use family connections to get necessary transportation. Two guests at the meeting Blong Yang, who serves as Minneapolis 5th ward alderman, and Pahoua Hoffman, policy director for the Citizens League, both of whom are Hmong, said that their immigrant communities have utilized extended families to acquire cars for family members to get to jobs. This approach is used much more frequently than public transit, which some Hmong immigrants are reluctant to use, they said. It is surprising how many cars one will see on driveways of Hmong households, Yang said.

One Civic Caucus interviewer replied that it is quite common in immigrant communities to see that families might be poor in a dollars-and-cents standpoint but not in a cultural sense. Many immigrants have an excellent ability to overcome income problems via cooperation within their respective communities.

Census data has some shortcomings. An interviewer pointed out that the Census Bureau doesn't factor in that a worker may take other trips—trip chaining—while going to and from work. An individual may hold two or three jobs, yet the Bureau data will recognize only one of those jobs. The Bureau also associates a worker with a definite location for a job, even though work may be performed in many locations, such as by construction workers or airline attendants and pilots.

It is important to hold other development and transit issues in perspective. An interviewer reminded attendees that today's discussion isn't about what the Twin Cities area should look like in the future. Some persons strongly advocate that most new residential development should be deliberately located near transit stations. Today's discussion focuses solely on finding creative ways today to link homes with employment locations to provide more job choices for individuals and more employee choices for employers.

Don't treat people as commodities. Too often employees are regarded only as another expense in doing business, as interchangeable commodities or as replaceable parts in a machine, an interviewer observed. That's why it's so important not to overlook this critical aspect of every employee's daily routine, getting to and from work, a task almost ignored by many persons but a task that is very difficult for others.

Learn from targeted efforts to help persons with disabilities. An interviewer suggested that in addressing the issue of helping people get from home to work and back we might find some workable options in transportation strategies already in place that provide rides for persons with disabilities.

Include race and poverty as factors in transportation funding? An interviewer drew the attention of the group to an [MPR report](#) this week that features action by the Metropolitan Council. For the first time transportation projects vying for federal dollars in the metro area will be judged partly on whether they benefit the poor and people of color. One question, however, is whether and how these funds will open up year-round job opportunities that can be reached by non-fixed-route transportation services or on bike paths.

Is the car the enemy or friend of essential work-trip transportation? —Like it or not, an interviewer observed, the car is the dominant mode of travel in the region. Moreover, it could be regarded as the dominant transit mode if one interprets transit as broadly as riding with others, not driving alone. The interviewer asserted that substantially more people carpool to work than take transit.

[Click here](#) for the data list used for this presentation.