

# Negotiating Transportation Insecurity: Local Responses and Coping Strategies in San José, CA

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## Introduction

This research improves understanding of transportation insecurity in San José through an analysis of residents' transportation experiences. Specifically, the research examines people's transportation insecurity experiences, the methods people use to cope with the issue, and the effects of transportation insecurity on their life. This research is relevant because transportation is an ever-growing point of interest as traffic increases and space usage changes in metropolitan areas. The information from this study provides important considerations for future improvements or developments of different transportation systems. Overall, the purpose of this research is to gain insight into the factors that contribute to transportation insecurity and the effects that transportation insecurity has on people's everyday lives.

## Study Methods

Due to the constraints from the COVID-19 pandemic, this study used remote methods to recruit participants and

collect data. The researchers used a short seven-question online recruitment survey that was distributed to residents living in downtown San José. Eighty-five people responded to the survey. Thirteen survey participants indicated they were transportation insecure, and were recruited to partake in a follow-up online interview through Zoom. The interview asked participants about their transportation conditions, experiences, feelings, and responses to transportation insecurity. The researchers conducted an inductive thematic analysis of the interview transcripts and used Verbi Software MAXQDA to identify major themes of the ways people experience transportation insecurity in San José.

## Findings

Findings indicate that downtown San José residents experience transportation insecurity as excess time consumption. The interview participants are able to move around San José, but commuting takes up more time than is often expected. Excess time consumption manifested

in mainly three forms: convoluted schedules, congested traffic, and service complications. Each form causes issues in terms of lateness, missing out on activities, or limiting people's trip choices. As a result, interview participants coped with these issues in two main ways: temporarily changing transportation or changing the trip. But these choices were more dependent on the person's access to other resources. In these cases, people either used more costly transportation modes or canceled the trip entirely. These transportation insecurity situations and reactions made several participants feel worried as they often feel they do not have that many available transportation options, especially with worries relating to the pandemic.

Despite the transportation system in San José, many people prefer to use their cars rather than the alternatives because the other options use up more of their already-limited time.

### Policy/Practice Recommendations

The findings of this research indicate that policymakers should attend to ensuring transit systems are more inclusive, including responding to resident concerns about safety, accessibility, convenience, and affordability. Moving forward from this small pilot study, future research should incorporate a larger sample size, focus on a single mode of transportation, and conduct a comparative analysis to understand in-and-between differences in people's experiences. These actions would make future research more representative of the city of San José and present more streamlined and in-depth information for policymakers.

### About the Authors

**Andrew K. Ng** is an Applied Anthropology master's student whose interests lie in people's interactions with transportation. He hopes to work to help improve the system in some way.

**Dr. Melissa Beresford** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Anthropology at San José State University. Her research investigates how humans mobilize markets and informal economic institutions to adapt to resource insecurities.

### To Learn More

For more details about the study, download the full report at [transweb.sjsu.edu/research/2019](https://transweb.sjsu.edu/research/2019)



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