

Commuting in the United States: 2022

American Community Survey Briefs

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INTRODUCTION

This brief presents statistics on commuting behavior in the United States based on the 2022 American Community Survey (ACS).¹ These data provide detailed estimates of demographic, social, economic, and housing characteristics for the nation, states and state equivalents, metropolitan and micropolitan areas, and many other geographic summary levels every year.² The text box “What Is the American Community Survey?” describes the ACS in more detail.

The COVID-19 pandemic substantially changed U.S. commuting behaviors between 2019 and 2021, especially with respect to home-based work.³ Employers, workers, families, governments, and service providers continued to adjust to the

constraints of the pandemic in 2022.⁴ For example, many employers encouraged workers to return to on-site work while testing flexible work arrangements, traditional employment centers hosted fewer on-site workers, and many states and municipalities evaluated the role public transportation should play given reduced and uncertain ridership. This brief describes how commuting behaviors have developed since the pandemic’s initial disruption.

MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION

The ACS asks workers aged 16 and over to select how they usually got to work the previous week (Figure 1). People commuting by different methods on different days are asked to select the method used most days.

¹ The Census Bureau has reviewed this data product to ensure appropriate access, use, and disclosure avoidance protection of the confidential source data used to produce this product. Data Management System (DMS) number: P-001-0000001262, Disclosure Review Board (DRB) approval number: CBDRB-FY23-POP001-0154.

² The text of this report discusses statistics for the United States, including the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. Statistics for Puerto Rico, collected with the 2019, 2021, and 2022 Puerto Rico Community Survey, are included in the text box entitled “Commuting in Puerto Rico.”

³ Michael Burrows, Charlynn Burd, and Brian McKenzie, “Home-Based Workers and the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *American Community Survey Reports*, ACS-52, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 2023.

⁴ In 2020, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted data collection and resulted in lower survey response rates. Those who responded to the ACS had statistically different social, economic, and housing characteristics than those who did not. This resulted in unreasonable estimates, or ones that were inconsistent with benchmarks and administrative data. These inconsistencies signaled a serious quality issue and nonresponse bias in the 2020 ACS 1-year data. Rather than release the estimates using standard methodology, the Census Bureau created experimental estimates using a new weighting methodology aimed at mitigating the nonresponse bias in the 2020 data. This report compares 2019, 2021, and 2022 data, which used consistent weighting methodologies. For additional information on the experimental data, visit <www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/data/experimental-data.html>.

The majority of U.S. workers have driven alone to work every year that ACS data have been collected, but the COVID-19 pandemic introduced a striking decline in the share of people who drove alone to work. In 2019, 75.9 percent of workers drove alone to work, compared to about 67.8 percent in 2021. By 2022, this figure increased to 68.7 percent, still significantly lower than the share driving alone to work before the pandemic (Figure 2). The percentage of workers commuting by carpool dropped from 8.9 percent in 2019 to 7.8 percent in 2021 before rebounding almost to the prepandemic level in 2022, at 8.6 percent. Workers who biked or walked to work made up 2.9 percent of all workers in 2022, a smaller share than in 2019 but larger than in 2021. Just 1.5 percent of workers commuted by taxicab, motorcycle, or other means of transportation in 2022, with no significant change in the category since 2019.

Public transportation ridership was cut roughly in half during the first phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the share of U.S. workers commuting by transit dropping from 5.0 percent in 2019 to 2.5 percent in 2021—the lowest share ever recorded by the ACS. In 2022, this share increased to 3.1 percent, still substantially lower than in 2019.

WHAT IS THE AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY?

The American Community Survey (ACS) is a nationwide survey designed to provide reliable and timely demographic, social, economic, and housing data for the nation, states, congressional districts, counties, places, and other localities every year. It has an annual sample size of about 3.5 million addresses across the United States and Puerto Rico and includes both housing units and group quarters (e.g., nursing homes and prisons). The ACS is conducted in every county throughout the nation and in every municipio in Puerto Rico, where it is called the Puerto Rico Community Survey. Beginning in 2006, ACS data for 2005 were released for geographic areas with populations of 65,000 and greater. For information on the ACS sample design and other topics, visit www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/.

Figure 1.

Question on Travel Mode From the 2022 American Community Survey

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.

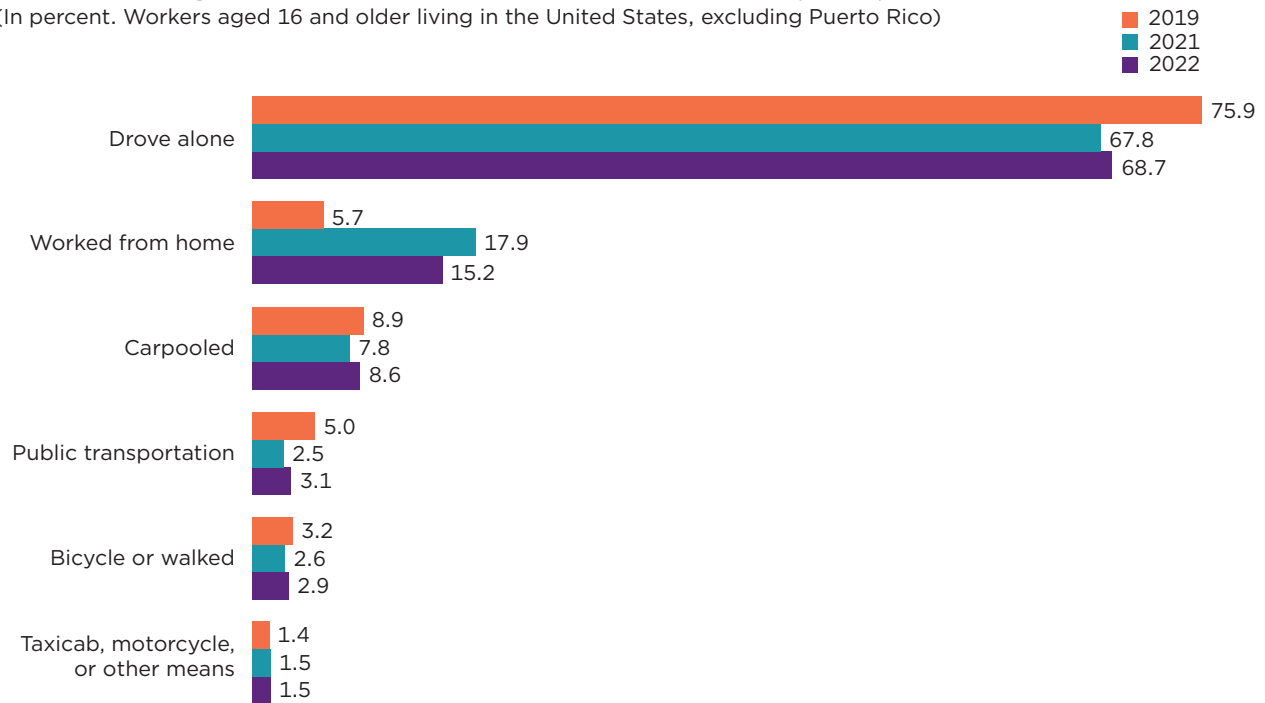
☐ Car, truck, or van	☐ Taxicab
☐ Bus	☐ Motorcycle
☐ Subway or elevated rail	☐ Bicycle
☐ Long-distance train or commuter rail	☐ Walked
☐ Light rail, streetcar, or trolley	☐ Worked from home → SKIP to question 40a
☐ Ferryboat	☐ Other method

Note: For information, refer to www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/methodology/questionnaire-archive.html.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey.

Figure 2.

Means of Transportation to Work in the United States: 2019, 2021, and 2022

(In percent. Workers aged 16 and older living in the United States, excluding Puerto Rico)



Note: For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, refer to <www.census.gov/acs>.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2019, 2021, and 2022 American Community Survey, 1-year estimates.

According to a 2021 Census Bureau report, in 2019 about 70 percent of metro-based transit commuters (public transportation commuters living in U.S. metro areas) lived in one of the seven transit-heavy metro areas: Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Washington, DC.⁵ A closer look at these metros illustrates the sharp decline in transit commuting

⁵ Michael Burrows, Charlynn Burd, and Brian McKenzie, "Commuting by Public Transportation in the United States," *American Community Survey Reports*, ACS-48, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 2021, <www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2021/acs/acs-48.pdf>.

during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the extent of the rebound since the pandemic's first phase (Figure 3).⁶ Transit commuting did not return to 2019 levels in any of

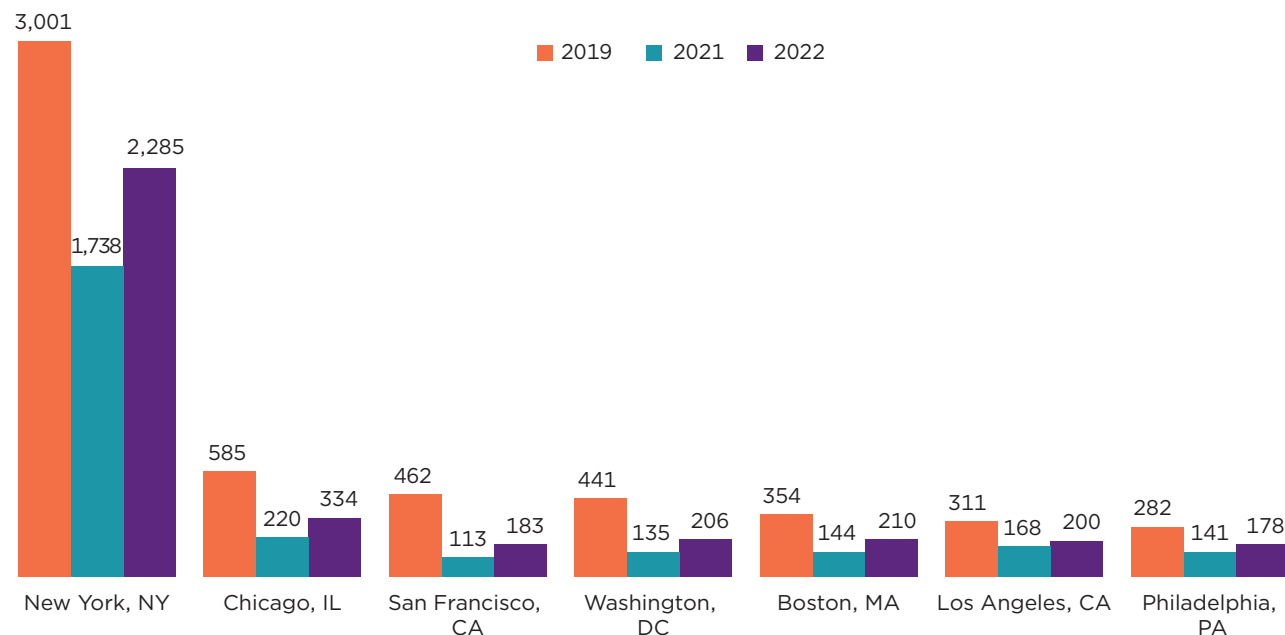
⁶ This brief uses metropolitan and micropolitan area definitions based on the U.S. Office of Management and Budget delineation from September 4, 2018 (2019 ACS, 1-year estimates), and March 6, 2020 (2021 and 2022 ACS, 1-year estimates). Metropolitan statistical areas are based on urbanized areas of 50,000 or more population, and micropolitan statistical areas are based on urban clusters of at least 10,000 population but less than 50,000 population. The largest incorporated place in each statistical area is designated a "principal city." Additional places may also qualify as principal cities if specific requirements are met. For more information about metropolitan statistical areas, refer to <www.census.gov/programs-surveys/metro-micro/about.html>.

the seven transit-heavy metros by 2022, though it did increase in all of them since 2021. In the New York metro, historically home to far more public transportation commuters than any other metropolitan area, there were roughly 700,000 fewer transit commuters in 2022 than in 2019. In the Washington, DC metro area, where many federal employees live and work, the number of transit commuters in 2022 was less than half the 2019 estimate. In the San Francisco metro area, the relative decrease in transit commuters was even steeper, from about 462,000 in 2019 to about 183,000 in 2022.

Figure 3.

Public Transportation Commuters in Seven Major Metropolitan Areas: 2019, 2021, and 2022

(In thousands. Workers aged 16 and older living in the United States, excluding Puerto Rico)



Note: The seven transit-heavy metro areas are denoted by their principal city and include: the Boston-Cambridge-Newton, MA-NH Metro Area; the Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN-WI Metro Area; the Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA Metro Area; the New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ-PA Metro Area; the Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington, PA-NJ-DE-MD Metro Area; the San Francisco-Oakland-Berkeley, CA Metro Area; and the Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV Metro Area. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, refer to www.census.gov/acs/.

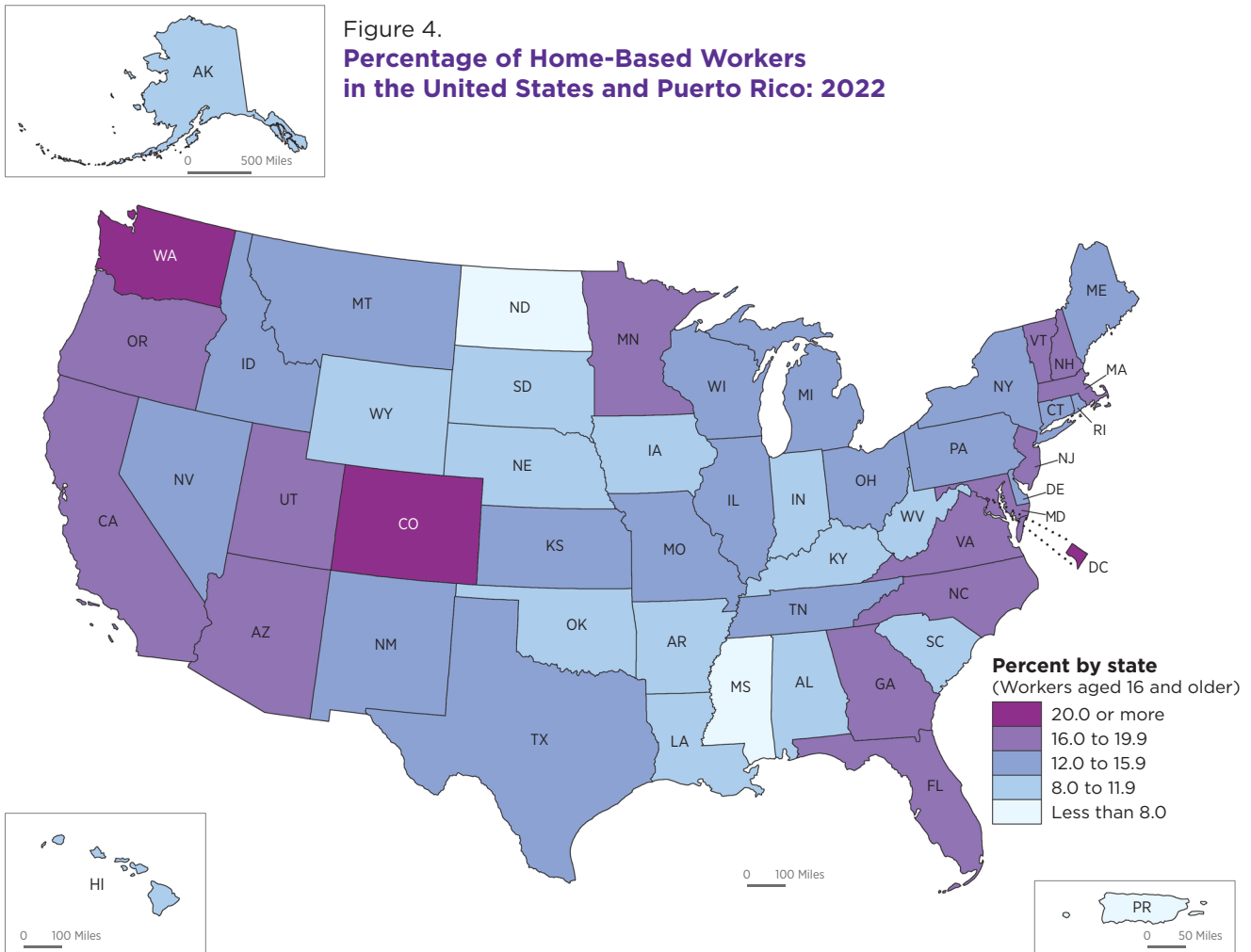
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2019, 2021, and 2022 American Community Survey, 1-year estimates.

The share of people working from home roughly tripled during the pandemic's initial phase, from 5.7 percent of workers in 2019 to 17.9 percent in 2021, but then declined to 15.2 percent of workers in 2022 as public health protections came to an end. As in prior years, the percentage of home-based workers varied

by geographic area (Figure 4). However, uneven adoption of working from home contributed to generally large differences between geographic areas where home-based work was widely implemented and those where it was less widely adopted. For example, the share of home-based workers in Colorado, the District

of Columbia, and Washington was 20 percent or more in 2022, while only around 8 percent of workers or less in Mississippi, North Dakota, and Puerto Rico worked from home. Because it aims to capture respondents' usual commuting mode, the ACS provides an estimate of those who work from home for the majority of the

Figure 4.
**Percentage of Home-Based Workers
in the United States and Puerto Rico: 2022**



Note: For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, refer to <www.census.gov/acs/>.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey, 1-year estimates.

workweek and likely excludes those who work from home less frequently or less routinely. The Survey of Income and Program Participation collects different

information about commuting and work schedule behaviors among the working population and has provided evidence of growth in

mixed or hybrid work schedules between 2019 and 2021.⁷

⁷ Clayton Gumber and Michael Burrows, "Home-Based Workers: 2019-2021," *Current Population Reports*, P70BR-184, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 2023.

COMMUTING IN PUERTO RICO

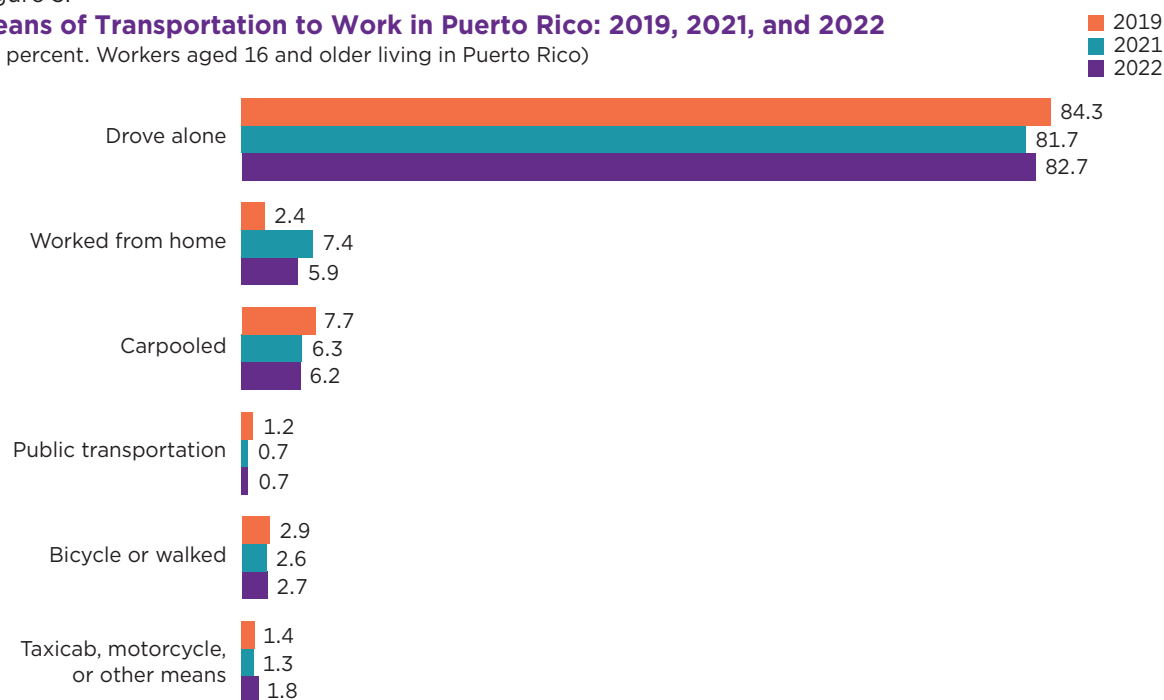
As in the remainder of the United States, commuting patterns have changed in Puerto Rico since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Unlike the 50 states and the District of Columbia, the share of workers who drove alone to work declined relatively little between 2019 and 2022 (Figure 5). Public transportation commuters in Puerto Rico, in 2021 as well as 2022, made up about two-thirds of the 2019 share. Home-based workers roughly tripled as a share of all workers in Puerto Rico, from 2.4 percent in 2019 to 7.4 percent in 2021, before declining to 5.9 in 2022. Notably, the total number of workers in Puerto Rico increased by only about 20,000 between 2019 and 2021 but grew by nearly 70,000 between 2021 and 2022.¹

¹ Puerto Rico Community Survey, 1-year estimates, Table B08006.

Figure 5.

Means of Transportation to Work in Puerto Rico: 2019, 2021, and 2022

(In percent. Workers aged 16 and older living in Puerto Rico)



Note: For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, refer to <www.census.gov/prcs>. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2019, 2021, and 2022 Puerto Rico Community Survey, 1-year estimates.

TRAVEL TIME

Average one-way travel time to work among commuters (those who are employed and at work and who do not work from home) marked a 10-year low in 2021 (25.6 minutes) after reaching a historic

high in 2019 (27.6 minutes).⁸ In 2022, travel time increased by almost 1 minute to 26.4 minutes (Table 1). As in prior years, there

⁸ Charlynn Burd, Michael Burrows, and Brian McKenzie, "Travel Time to Work in the United States," *American Community Survey Reports*, ACS-47, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 2021, <<https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2021/acs/acs-47.pdf>>.

were significant differences in travel time by community type.

Average one-way travel time to work was longer in metropolitan areas (26.8 minutes) than in micropolitan areas (23.0) or outside metro or micro areas (25.0 minutes).⁹ Within metro

⁹ Examples of micropolitan areas include Batavia, New York; Bozeman, Montana; Greenville, Ohio; and Sanford, North Carolina.

areas, travel time was longer outside of principal cities (27.8 minutes). Travel time in metro areas also dropped by around 2 minutes between 2019 and 2021 before rebounding by almost a full minute, roughly mirroring the national trend. Travel time also varied by principal city status within metro and micro areas (Table 1).

TIME OF DEPARTURE

ACS respondents who commuted to work (again, excluding home-based workers) also provide their time of departure for work. This detail provides data users with information about the changing demand for transportation infrastructure and when it is most utilized by commuters.

As shown in Figure 6, 83.3 million workers in 2022 departed for the workplace during the “core commuting hours” of 6 a.m. to 8:59 a.m., a significant increase from 2021 but still around 9 million fewer than the 92.1 million workers in 2019. Other categories changed much less. For example, the number of workers

Table 1.

Average One-Way Travel Time to Work by Community Type: 2019, 2021, and 2022

(Workers aged 16 years and over who did not work from home living in the United States, excluding Puerto Rico. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, refer to <www.census.gov/acs>)

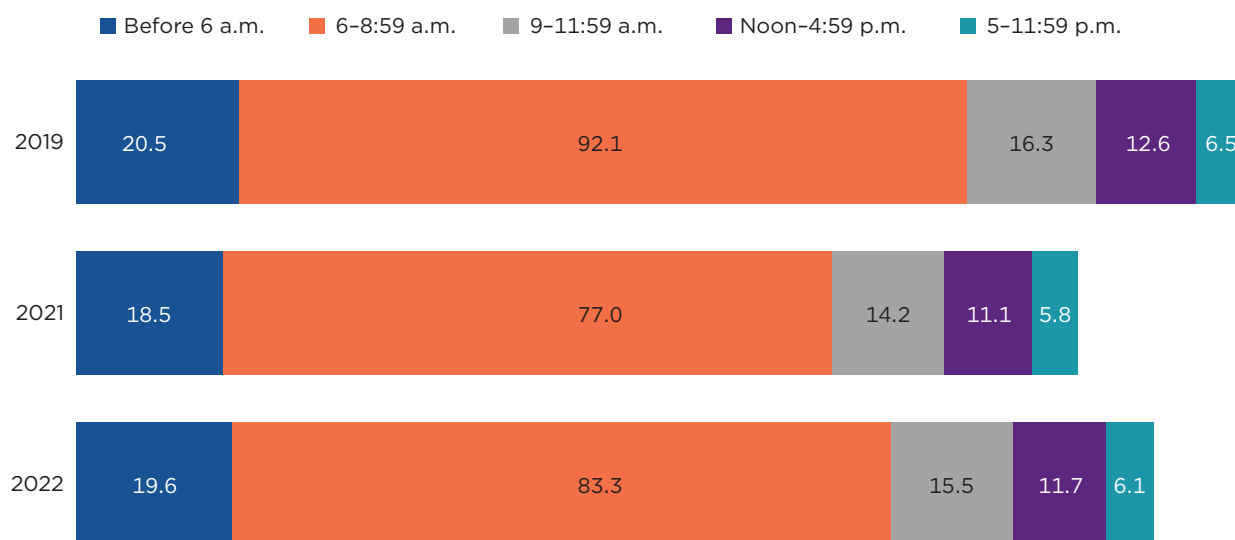
Community type	2019		2021		2022	
	Minutes	Margin of error (±)	Minutes	Margin of error (±)	Minutes	Margin of error (±)
All commuters	27.6	0.1	25.6	0.1	26.4	0.1
Metro area	28.1	0.1	26.0	0.1	26.8	0.1
Principal city	26.5	0.1	24.4	0.1	25.1	0.1
Elsewhere in metro	29.1	0.1	27.0	0.1	27.8	0.1
Micro area	23.0	0.1	22.4	0.1	23.0	0.1
Principal city	18.3	0.2	18.1	0.2	18.6	0.2
Elsewhere in micro	25.4	0.2	24.6	0.2	25.3	0.2
Outside metro or micro area	25.2	0.2	24.5	0.2	25.0	0.2

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2019, 2021, and 2022 American Community Survey, 1-year estimates.

Figure 6.

Time of Departure for Work: 2019, 2021, and 2022

(In millions. Workers aged 16 and older who did not work from home living in the United States, excluding Puerto Rico)



Note: For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, refer to <www.census.gov/acs>.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2019, 2021, and 2022 American Community Survey, 1-year estimates.

leaving between 12 a.m. and 6 a.m. dropped from 20.5 million in 2019 to 19.6 million in 2022, and the number of workers leaving from 9 a.m. to 11:59 a.m. dropped from 16.3 million in 2019 to 15.5 million in 2022.

The types of jobs conducted from home likely play a meaningful role in this shifting distribution. Recent Census Bureau research found that home-based work became increasingly associated with standard, predictable work schedules during the first 2 years of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁰ The persistent shift to home-based work likely contributed to the roughly 10 percent drop in commuters during core commuting hours and its corresponding impact on transportation infrastructure and the experiences of those who did commute.

SUMMARY

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic induced broad changes in U.S. commuting behaviors, and in significant ways these changes remained in place in 2022. The increase in home-based work retreated somewhat, yet more than 15 percent of workers continued to work from home, albeit with considerable variation across states. The share of workers who drove alone to work remained low by recent standards, as did the share commuting by public transportation. In Puerto Rico, home-based work also increased since 2019, but more workers

drove alone to work in 2022 than in 2019, and the number traveling by public transportation did not increase between 2021 and 2022. The average one-way commute time increased between 2021 and 2022 but remained well below the 2019 estimate, with residents of metropolitan areas generally experiencing longer commute times.

With levels of home-based work far higher, around 9 million fewer commuters departed their homes for the workplace during the core commuting hours of 6 a.m. to 8:59 a.m. in 2022 than in 2019.

Almost 140 million people in the United States routinely commuted to work in 2022, and more than 20 million worked from home.¹¹ The commuting experience—or, in the face of home-based work, its absence—is central to the life and well-being of many of these U.S. workers. As commuting behaviors change alongside other economic and social developments, the ACS will continue to collect data that help characterize the commuting experiences of workers and the broader patterns within their communities.

SOURCE AND ACCURACY

The data presented in this report are based on the American Community Survey and Puerto Rico Community Survey samples interviewed from January 1, 2019, through December 31, 2019 (2019 ACS and 2019 PRCS);

January 1, 2021, through December 31, 2021 (2021 ACS and 2021 PRCS); and January 1, 2022, through December 31, 2022 (2022 ACS and 2022 PRCS). The estimates based on these samples describe the average values of person, household, and housing unit characteristics over this period of collection. Sampling error is the uncertainty between an estimate based on a sample and the corresponding value that would be obtained if the estimate were based on the entire population (as from a census). Measures of sampling error are provided in the form of margins of error for all estimates included in this report. All comparative statements in this report have undergone statistical testing, and comparisons are significant at the 90 percent confidence level, unless otherwise noted. In addition to sampling error, nonsampling error may be introduced during any of the operations used to collect and process survey data, such as editing, reviewing, or keying data from questionnaires. For more information on sampling and estimation methods, confidentiality protection, and sampling and nonsampling errors, refer to the 2022 ACS Accuracy of the Data document at <www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/technical-documentation.html>.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Burrows, Michael, and Charlynn Burd, “Commuting in the United States: 2022,” *American Community Survey Briefs*, ACSBR-018, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 2024.

¹⁰ Clayton Gumber and Michael Burrows, “Home-Based Workers: 2019–2021,” *Current Population Reports*, P70BR-184, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 2023.

¹¹ Refer to 2022 American Community Survey, 1-year estimates, Table B08006.