

**Country Roads:  
How Undocumented Latino Populations in Rural Communities  
are Forced into Illegal Driving Practices by Inadequate  
Public Transportation Systems  
by  
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***Abstract:***

Much research on undocumented Latino immigrants and transportation focuses on an array of difficulties that come with being barred from obtaining a driver's license. There is a great deal of research circulating around the *aftermath* of these immigrant populations driving without licenses. However, there is a lack of research as to *why* these populations are choosing to risk so much through driving illegally. There is very little research centered around the inadequate public transportation systems in areas other than major cities throughout the U.S. This study seeks to add to the conversation of whether or not undocumented immigrants should be allowed drivers' licenses through exposing the reality that these individuals have no other options than to drive illegally as a result of inefficient public transit. My research aims to show the effects of this confluence on the experiences of undocumented Latino immigrants. I will conduct a series of in-depth interviews with ten people from this immigrant population who are faced with this dilemma. I will also collect data from organizations working with affected groups and compare that data against existing train and bus schedules throughout the township of Southampton, New York, in order to see where these systems are lacking. This study will aim to uncover the predicament behind this controversial debate of license eligibility and provide strong evidence for major revision to the system.

***Introduction:***

Improvement in public transportation systems is needed in rural agrarian areas like the east end of Long Island, where there are large populations of undocumented Latino immigrants. A nine-minute car ride between two locations on the east end has no alternate public transportation options on GPS and suggests that it would take an hour and twenty-two minutes to walk that same distance (Riga, 2018). Therefore, unlicensed individuals must turn to driving without a license to survive, even though they are risking so much in doing so. Every time an undocumented immigrant is caught driving without a license, they are in danger of being detained and processed for deportation (Ramos, 2016).

In an effort to evade being deported, there has been evidence of these immigrant populations avoiding doctors' appointments for themselves and their children, foregoing better paying jobs because they can't get to them, and not being able to get their children to school or

provide for them properly, because a trip to the grocery store could mean the separation of an entire family unit (Hill, Moloney, Mize, Himelick & Guest, 2011). There has also been evidence of these affected populations resorting to covert “altermobility” movements, fueled by social media, in order to subvert traditional vehicular law and thusly avoid detainment and deportation (Stuesse & Coleman, 2014). “Altermobility” is a means of mobilization and a movement building among immigrant communities seeking ways to survive, resist, and contest heightened immigrant policing (Stuesse & Coleman, 2014). Without these options for “altermobility,” immigrant groups frequently find themselves without any “legitimate” means for transportation and expose themselves to legal jeopardy, should they choose to act without them. There have been multiple cases of people being held in custody for forty-eight hours to fifteen days for driving without a license, so that ICE (Immigration Customs Enforcement) would have the ability and time to process them and see if they are eligible to be deported or not (Ramos, 2016).

Inefficient public transportation systems greatly influence undocumented Latino experiences, but this issue is currently under-researched. Failing to have reliable public transportation systems in places throughout the country --- so that undocumented immigrants can avoid further criminalizing themselves by driving without a license --- leaves room to speculate as to why there is hardly any development underway towards more efficient public transportation systems. This lack of transportation, coupled with a refusal to grant a drivers’ licenses to these populations, suggests “the marginalized status of undocumented immigrants,” in that the services otherwise supplied to fully naturalized citizens are not similarly made available to them (Johnson, 2004). Throughout my research, I will conjecture as to why this lack in transportation is occurring and the effects it is having on undocumented immigrants all throughout the country.

My study expands on this fledgling research through a series of in-depth interviews, combined with data I have received from organizations dealing with these topics and studies of existing bus and train routes. My research focuses on inefficient public transportation systems, paired with heightened enforcement on driving without a license, and their combined effects on the experiences of immigrant populations. Although there are other factors to acknowledge when considering the immigrant experience, my research explores how the lack of public transportation can criminalize unauthorized immigrants and endanger their well-being. I expect that my research will contribute to the public conversation on race and immigration in this country and helps local and governmental leaders see that these immigrant populations need to be better assisted when it comes to their transportation options.

### *Literature Review:*

#### **The History of Immigration to Long Island:**

#### **Trends in Immigration to Long Island, Past and Present**

The most recent census information published by the United States Census Bureau on July 1, 2017 shows that there are approximately 1,492,953 people living in Suffolk County, Long Island. The ethnic group found to make up the greatest percentage of that overall number was determined to be white or Caucasian, at 84.5 percent. The second largest ethnic group was reported as being Latin or Hispanic, at 19.5 percent. Median household income was found to be \$90,128.00, which took into account all ethnic groups reporting in the census. Reflecting the growing number of non-white groups that were included, 22.5 percent of those surveyed reported

that a language other than English was primarily spoken in the household (2012-2016). And, reflected by this article, the mean travel time to work that workers sixteen and up reported was 31.7 minutes (United States Census Bureau).

The developments reflected in the census appear to be the natural outgrowth of the general patterns of immigration to Long Island at large that have been monitored over the past two decades. In the study “The Changing Profile of Long Island’s Economy,” published by the Fiscal Policy Institute in November of 2010, researchers found that “immigration grew rapidly on Long Island” during that period of time (Federal Policy Institute, 1). At the same time, between the years 1990 and 2007, the economy of Long Island as a whole grew by 36 percent, even with the increase of 123,000 immigrants into the regional labor force (FDI, 1). The percentage of growth is all the more remarkable because, even as the percentage of non-U.S. born workers were coming into the workforce, the number of working age U.S.-born adults was shrinking by 94,000 over the same period of time (FDI, 10).

In other words, although the percentage of non-U.S.-born workers was *increasing* over the course of the two decades in question and the percentage of U.S.-born workers was correspondingly *decreasing*, the economy flourished anyway. By 2007, working and non-working immigrants made up 16 percent of the overall population on Long Island, a bigger number of immigrants than had ever resided there before, with little ill effect on the overall growth of the economy (FDI, 11).

The study found that immigrants from El Salvador made up the largest percentage of the non-U.S.-born groups surveyed, at 13 percent (FDI, 11). The study also found that, contrary to popular opinion, most non-U.S.-born workers who enter the Long Island workforce go into

white-collar jobs. As of its publication date, it found that 30 percent of the entire Latino population of non-U.S.-born immigrants who became employed went into white-collar careers (FDI, 17).

Given the evidence presented in the study, the researchers concluded in their summary of the data that the “Long Island economy has generally absorbed immigrants --- even undocumented immigrants --- at levels at which they have come in recent years with many positive benefits to the overall economy and with few negative effects on U.S.-born workers” (FDI, 1). The researchers point out one significant drawback of immigrants entering the workforce on Long Island --- the negative effect it has on U.S.-born groups with statistically lower levels of academic achievement. It notes, “...the effect of immigration on men with lower levels of education, particularly African American men, is an area of concern, as is the stagnation of wages at the lower end of the economic ladder” (FDI, 5).

While David Dyssegaard Kallick’s findings uphold those of the FDI study in his report “Immigration Impacts on the Long Island Economy,” he also takes the opportunity in his writing to speak to the heated debate that frequently surrounds the issue of immigration from an economical-statistical perspective. “(My) analysis finds very little basis for the frequently voiced concern that immigrants may be displacing U.S.-born workers” (Kallick, 32). He goes on to say, “Given the importance of immigrants to the Long Island economy, as well as the social reality of immigrants’ presence, it would seem more productive to focus on how to improve outcomes for those who may see negative impacts than to forgo the overall contribution of immigration” (Kallick, 33), while also pointing out the negative effects that this approach might have on the African American worker.

**Theory of Criminalization:****How Fear of the Few is Used to Condemn the Many**

New efforts to underscore the link between illegal immigration and criminal behavior, both by prominent state and national political figures, have their roots in recent American history. After 9/11, the United States has seen a rise in anti-immigrant sentiment and an obsession with keeping this country free from immigrants posing potential harm. This push to protect the homeland has contributed to the extreme governing of immigration because this sensibility presumes that immigrants are threats to the security of this country, no matter what their reasons for migrating are.

Undocumented migration is then further problematized by this fixed impression of “illegality” when considering immigrants as a whole (De Genova, 2013). Therefore, undocumented immigrants are criminalized due to the fact that they are in violation of U.S. immigration laws. The theory of undocumented immigrants inherent “illegality,” which is given to them through social construction (De Genova, 2013), gives us a way of looking at the current deficits that face undocumented immigrant populations and can show us the motivations behind these shortcomings. Furthermore, this way of envisioning the situation will help us gain a greater understanding as to why our country is reacting to this community in such a volatile way.

This inherently criminalizing way of looking at undocumented immigrants as “illegal” has been passed down throughout time and can be seen in current legislative actions and local law enforcement behaviors towards Latino immigrants. As documented in newspapers and

tabloids of late, the rise of MS-13, a gang that has currently moved into parts of Long Island, raises concerns as to whether or not local and/or governmental groups will use this gang's increasing membership as a way of further criminalizing Latino groups (Robbins, 2017).

Through increased detainment and deportation of Latino populations, due to claims of alleged involvement with MS-13, it is clear that this illegitimate trope has become heightened through the gang's presence (Dreier, 2018).

The theory of criminalization towards undocumented immigrants is a persistent concern throughout our current era (Riga, 2018; Hill, Moloney, Mize, Himelick & Guest, 2011; Ramos, 2016; Stuesse, Coleman, 2014). Latino populations are aware of this heightened age of criminalization and are concerned that President Trump would use MS-13's presence in the country as an excuse to deport more Latino immigrants (Robbins, 2017). Immigrant advocates claim that Suffolk County, Long Island, is becoming a police state through allegations made by immigration agents when arresting students in the Brentwood area without enough evidence of their perceived involvement with MS-13 gang members (Robbins, 2017). Current events demonstrate evidence to show that undocumented immigrants are being held and deported, through ICE's cooperation with Suffolk police enforcement, who have no affiliation with MS-13 (Robbins, 2017).

There is further evidence of heightened criminalization of Latino populations in the recent example of a sixteen-year-old Latino youth held in immigration detention for being a suspected member of MS-13, only to be released due to lack of evidence (Gonzalez, 2017). This particular narrative, exposed by local newspapers, is not uncommon, relative to the experiences of Latino immigrants as a whole on Long Island. At least thirty-two immigrant teens who were

in the U.S. without their parental guardians were arrested for alleged gang membership as a part of a Trump administrative action directed towards suppression of MS-13 gang activity and immigrant crime (Gonzalez, 2017). Given law enforcement's documented habit of associating members of recent immigrant groups with gang membership, as demonstrated in the above articles, it is imperative to examine the interconnectedness of racial attitudes and public policy if we're ever going to fully understand why the need for adequate bus transportation is so imperative in Latino communities.

Limited public transportation options available to residents in non-urban areas serves as a stark example of the ways in which civic policy and law enforcement contribute to expose undocumented communities to legal jeopardy and suppress immigrant populations in a given area. Furthermore, the issue of whether to grant undocumented immigrants a driver's license or not is a prime example of how this social viewpoint of immigrants being criminals and "illegal" (De Genova, 2013) fuels the opinions behind this civil rights issue (Johnson, 2004). The driver's license controversy illustrates how undocumented Latino immigrants are seen as a marginalized group and somehow undeserving in nature (Johnson, 2004; De Genova, 2013). While a naturalized U.S. citizen has the legal right to petition for a driver's license at a legally prescribed age, varying from state to state (eighteen in the state of New York), an undocumented immigrant can't hope to enjoy such an easy path to transportation entitlement, further reinforcing the less-than-equal status of their presence in this country.

**Research Area:****Long Island's South Fork (Hampton Bays to Montauk)**

I narrowed the geographic focus of my research to the South Fork of Long Island, an area I am familiar with from having grown up there. The South Fork, stretching along the Atlantic Ocean, encompasses the townships of Southampton and East Hampton and begins where the island divides itself into two distinct peninsulas (North and South) at the mouth of the Peconic River. I analyzed all available bus and train lines that service this region and the undocumented population that resides within it, getting a more in-depth look at a directly affected area.

The economic profile of the South Fork differs measurably from other areas of Long Island. In addition to attracting tourists from all over the world each summer, the region is also home to many of the 644 farms reported to be in operation on Long Island in the 2007 census survey conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Total agricultural sales in the year of the census reached \$258.7 million, excluding profits generated by the growing wine producing industry. Much of the undocumented population that lives and works in this region is employed in the tourist or agricultural industries (DiNapoli, 2012).

**Resistance:****Forms of Altermobility and the Rise of Community Activism**

Undocumented Latino populations throughout the country are finding ways to circumvent this impractical position they are faced with. There has been evidence of these communities creating mass group texts, warning each other of traffic stops to avoid in an effort to prevent deportation (Stuesse, Coleman, 2014). Intensification of policing towards immigrant communities has become increasingly more prevalent in recent years. One of the most debilitating factors of this political change is the 287g Act, like Senate Bill 1070, which allows police officers to act as immigration officials and detain undocumented immigrants during a simple traffic stop, escalating it into a deportation proceeding (Stuesse, Coleman, 2014). This policing of “automobility” is resulting in “immobility” which leads to “altermobility” within these immigrant communities (Stuesse, Coleman, 2014).

In this respect, immigrants face a major contradiction in systems, where driving is a prerequisite but where they are not allowed licenses. Although this heightened policing on automobility has resulted in urgent immobility within these immigrant groups, it has also helped to “generate a new altermobility” (Stuesse & Coleman, 2014). These new ways of working together to combat such limiting standards are a way of survival within these immigrant groups and can be looked at as “weapons of the weak” (Stuesse & Coleman, 2014). Despite the ingenuity of such group endeavors, immigrant groups are overmanned and outmaneuvered by the systems of power already in place, which seek to suppress their efforts to subvert them.

In order to offset the gross disparity between community activism and traditional power structures, grassroots organizations like OLA (Organizacion Latino-Americana of Eastern Long Island) and Puente of Arizona are doing all they can to help Latino populations through such uncertain times. These organizations are giving Latino populations the tools they need to fight back against creators of the corrupt systems in place (Strauss, 2016). Puente offers a six-week training course to all of their members, which aims to make them aware of their legal rights and steps they can take to best protect themselves and their families during traffic stops or any encounter with the local or official law enforcement (Strauss, 2016).

OLA's hands-on approach to the situation of transportation inefficiency on the east end and their pervasive presence in the community frequently designates them as the first ones to be called when there is an issue regarding undocumented Latinos' well being. OLA was contacted by trusted members of their community regarding several recent occurrences of ICE using unmarked cars to pull over Latinos and then run their names and/or IDs. OLA made sure that this claim was true by contacting local Southampton town police to verify. Southampton police then called ICE to learn if this was true and found out the claims were accurate. In an effort to help the Latino population being affected by this occurrence, OLA sent out a mass email stating the steps that should be taken if a Latino immigrant were to be pulled over by an unmarked car. In an effort to diminish the hardships that Latino immigrants face in order to get to important destinations, OLA has developed a transportation option for their community, offering temporary free and confidential van rides to doctors' offices three days a week (Riga, 2018). This act of service has created one of the only opportunities Latino populations on the east end have to maintain their physical well being, without risking deportation and the separation of their family

units. However, OLA only has the funds for this type of transportation through the winter of 2019 and will have to design other means of helping to transport these populations safely.

### **Drivers' Licenses for All:**

#### **The Positive Effects of Licensing Undocumented Populations**

Some areas in the country have chosen a more friendly approach to dealing with immigration, which has proved to have positive effects in the end for both undocumented and documented populations. California passed Assembly Bill 60 (AB60), which gave out 600,000 licenses during its first year alone in 2015 (Lueders, Hainmueller, & Lawrence, 2017). There was a study done as to whether or not this bill's passing showed any improvement in road safety. The researchers on this project went through monthly data on accident reports given out by the state and DMV records of people with outstanding licenses before the bill was announced and afterwards (Lueders, Hainmueller, & Lawrence, 2017). The findings revealed that this bill has seemingly increased the safety of people on the road and has helped many financially by decreasing the number of hit and run accidents, due to reduced fears of deportation and costs of accidents without insurance (Lueders, Hainmueller, & Lawrence, 2017).

Furthermore, safety benefits stemming from undocumented groups receiving licenses are not the only conceivable positive results that can come from this friendly approach towards immigrant populations. Assigning immigrants a driver's license could positively affect real average annual IEs (insurance expenditures) (Cáceres, Jameson, 2015). Allowing undocumented immigrants driver's insurance and licenses could drop the prices of insurance costs for everyone,

including documented citizens (Cáceres, Jameson, 2015). A series of fixed effects regression models were done to provide empirical tests on these claims along with charts of real average annual IEs, using data from forty-one states for fourteen years on twelve variables (Cáceres, Jameson, 2015). These models showed that restricting undocumented immigrants access to a driver's license statistically increases average annual IEs significantly (Cáceres, Jameson, 2015). The economic effects of granting undocumented immigrants a driver's license can be empirically seen through these types of research models, which can be a stronger way of encouraging change, compared to talking about the ambiguous political aspects surrounding the issue.

### ***Methods:***

My study was qualitative by design. I conducted in-depth interviews with ten people from my target population (individuals over the age of eighteen) on the subject of lack of public transportation and limited access to drivers' licenses. I also compared the experiences they related to a detailed analysis I conducted on public transportation routes within the township of Southampton, New York, as shown below in *Figure 1 and 2*, in order to corroborate how the gaps in currently designed routes contribute to the significant inconveniences my subjects described.

Figure 1:



Figure 2:



I focused on this interview format in order to allow those groups and individuals to speak for themselves as to the effects that transportation shortfalls have had on the immigrant community.

I divided my pool of interviewees into two distinct groups, those who had been directly affected by the issues being examined and those indirectly affected but who nonetheless possessed a significant wealth of second hand information from having worked in the field of immigration advocacy. The profiles of those interviewees directly affected were as follows:

Interviewee #1: Female, Ecuadorian, mid-forties, single, mother of a daughter  
Interviewee #2: Female, Ecuadorian, forties, married, mother of three  
Interviewee #3: Female, Honduran, late-thirties, has a partner and children  
Interviewee #4: Male, Ecuadorian, forty-two years old, single, no children  
Interviewee #5: Male, Costa Rican, twenty-three years old, single, no children

Four of the five interviews I conducted with those indirectly affected were with individuals who work for OLA, the same advocacy group that was instrumental in arranging my interviews with the directly affected subjects. The fifth interview was with a woman who acts as a court appointed translator for Spanish speaking clients, many of whom appear before the court in Riverhead for driving and license-related infractions. Assurances were given to all these individuals at the time of the interviews that the subjects' names and any specifically identifying personal details (employers' names, personal addresses, etc.) would be omitted from the final paper.

The profiles of those interviewees indirectly affected who helped facilitate my meetings with the directly affected population were as follows:

Executive Director, OLA  
Transportation Advocate & Outreach Coordinator, OLA  
Human Rights Attorney, OLA  
Staff Member, OLA

### Court Appointed Translator (Spanish)

The members of each group were asked an identical series of questions and given no specific limitations on the length or nature of their response to those questions. I was able to collect data on both the emotional effects of transportation inadequacies on the lives of Latino immigrants and draw connections to the infrastructural shortcomings which lead to this population being forced to drive illegally as the only viable means of maintaining employment and providing for their families.

### *Findings/Analysis:*

#### **Transportation Related to Employment and Job Security**

Interviewee #1 moved to East Hampton from Brooklyn twelve years ago after immigrating from Ecuador. While she found the residents of Brooklyn “more social” than her current neighbors, she was nervous about the police presence in the city and reports to feeling happier in East Hampton township because “she feel(s) at home...and tries to do everything the right way.” Nevertheless, life can still be difficult for her and her eleven year old daughter, who she is raising on her own. When asked what some of the biggest challenges facing her are on a daily basis in her new home were, Interviewee #1 responded, “There’s no transportation on time. It’s late and because of that it affects how and when you get to work and how your boss sees you.”

Interviewee #1 doesn’t rely on the train service at all to get her to work each day; neither do any of the other interviewees in my study, who all dismissed it as being inadequate to meet

their needs. Instead, she relies on the bus service, although it frequently disappoints her and familiarly gets her into trouble with the people who employ her to clean their homes in the same township wherein she lives.

I have to be at work at ten in the morning so I make plans to leave by eight or ask for a ride from someone to get to town because that's where the stop is. Most of the time I finish at six at night and sometimes I have to walk home because the bus never comes. I have to walk two hours and sometimes I get out later and the last bus is at six-thirty.

While also Ecuadorian, Interviewee #2 has never lived anywhere else in the United States but East Hampton, so she has no previous community experiences to draw upon for comparison. Nevertheless, she reports feeling very content with life on the east end of Long Island after nineteen years of residence and, when asked, describes East Hampton as “a very relaxed town” that “looks very clean to me.” The biggest challenge she faces there is transportation. As she puts it, “We don't have good transportation to go any place we'd like to.”

The lack of reliable public transportation has been a constant ever since she arrived from her native country. As a result, Interviewee #2 drives illegally in her family vehicle every day to her job in Riverhead, which is about ten minutes from her home in traffic; it is the only way that she can think of to maintain her employment. This unavoidable daily risk leaves her anxious and unsure each time she gets into the car. On top of the legal ramifications that would result if she were pulled over, Interviewee #2 is also nervous to drive because of the lingering memory of a previous traffic accident she was involved in in 2015. “When I was pregnant,” she recalls, “I went into the other lane and had an accident.”

A “nervous” driver with a history of automotive accident, Interviewee #2 can nevertheless think of no other way out of her transportational dilemma than to make the illegal

ten minute trip by car each day. Despite the risk she knows that she is running, she takes the chance nonetheless to sustain her family financially.

I would love it if the transportation was more efficient...Every hour would be ideal for me.

Like the previous interviewee, Interviewee #3 gave up relying on the public transportation system a year ago and bought a car, opting to drive herself to work and other appointments rather than suffer the inconveniences of the trains and buses. "It is very bad (public transportation)," she reports, "because the bus only came every two or three hours."

When I used the bus, it took me an hour to get to my job. Now that I have a car, it takes me five minutes to get to work.

Interviewee #3 has been living in East Hampton for three years after arriving from Honduras and grew very familiar with the operative realities of the bus lines in her area before opting out altogether. Though there is a bus stop very near to where she lives, one she would otherwise use regularly to avoid the risks of driving, she found that it was nearly impossible to meet her work commitments and support her family if she were left to depend upon public transportation.

In summertime it's never on time and sometimes its a half an hour or an hour delay. In order to get to my appointments on time, I had to take the bus two hours before so I could be on time.

A twelve year resident of the east end after moving north from Atlanta, Interviewee #4 owns his own car and drives both to work and to other appointments, having given up on the available public transportation in the area a long time ago. "As a construction worker," he reported, "I had to be in different places, so I had to use friends and not the buses." Exploiting

his loose network of friends and family in the area for transportation to and from his various work sites started to become unreliable itself, so the interviewee purchased his own vehicle and began driving illegally.

Question: What does your daily commute look like?

Answer: I work in construction so I'm self-employed. I have to drive a lot to check the jobs that I have. Right now it's very easy cause the summer hasn't started yet. I have to be back and forth and I even have to go to Riverhead for a lot of things for my job.

In his answer, Interviewee #4 points out two important realities that frequently get overlooked in the driver's license debate as it applies to the east end of Long Island. On top of the much commented upon unreliability of the existing public transportation system, his response points out two additional realities that impact on undocumented residents living in the area.

The first is that most undocumented residents are self-employed or involved in extra-legal work arrangements with their employers; i.e., their work hours are arranged to accommodate the employer's personal schedule and their payments are made off the books. This reality makes relying on *any* public transportation system unrealistic, since there's not a predictable regularity to the worker's day.

The second reality highlighted by Interviewee #4's response is that the economic life cycle of the Hamptons and the east end of Long Island is largely seasonal. As a major tourist destination in the warmer weather, the burdens placed on the public transportation system change dramatically, depending on the season. Yet the system itself doesn't shift dramatically to accommodate these seasonal changes in ridership. So that an undocumented worker without a driver's license would only be able to rely upon the buses in the off-season, before the warmer weather brings more tourists, more traffic, and thus more slowdowns in the system. As

Interviewee #4 went on to comment when explaining why he made the decision to drive rather than ride the buses

I think that the summer is always busy and it's always good to have more facilities for public transportation. The service needs to be better in the summer. The public transportation needs to change along with the seasons.

In 2018, Interviewee #5 moved away from Riverhead, Long Island, to Brooklyn, New York, having secured a job in the city as a media technician for a popular museum. He continues to visit with family regularly on the east end and confesses to missing the "open space" of his childhood home. When asked what he likes most about his current living situation in Brooklyn, however, he quickly points out the "accessibility" and "transportation."

The interviewee arrived as a child from Costa Rica when he was thirteen years old and spent the next decade of his life growing up in Riverhead. Over the course of those ten years, he was able to witness first-hand how the ethnic makeup of the population altered dramatically, to parallel his own experience as an immigrant.

Question: Has it (Riverhead) changed a lot since you first moved here?

Answer: Absolutely. Even from looking at my old high school. It used to be nineteen percent Spanish. Now, it's something like fifty percent. And, economically speaking, a lot of that change was reflected in Riverhead, with the construction of big chain retail outlets which employed a lot of people.

Because of his immigration status, Interviewee #5 is still unable to obtain a driver's license and must rely on public transportation to get around in New York City. Nevertheless, he understands the advantage he enjoys over his previous life in Riverhead when it comes to public transportation. While he speaks of the vast network of subways and buses in the city as being

“essential” to his economic survival and “packed every morning” with commuters like himself, he reflects upon the inadequacies of the public transportation that was available to him growing up and that hasn’t improved much since he’s been gone.

Question: Did you feel like you could rely on the public transportation system (in Riverhead)?

Answer: Absolutely not. It never came or it was always late and you had to wait for hours. And they would miss all the side streets because they (the drivers) weren’t trained properly. And I heard they cut different bus lines, which made it so much harder. I was affected directly because a bus line I used was cut. People had to drop out because they couldn’t get to school.

The Executive Director of OLA corroborates many of the interviewees’ thoughts about the inadequacies of public transportation and the difficulties it adds onto finding and sustaining meaningful regular employment in the area.

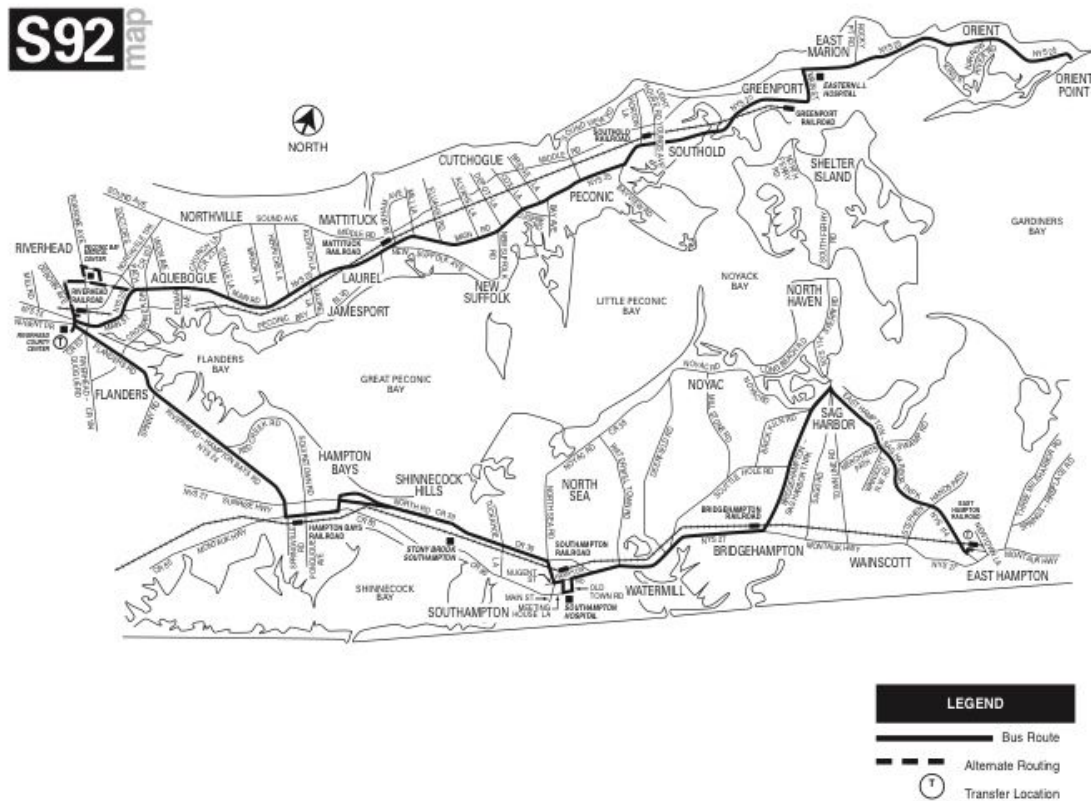
The east end of Long Island has gotten to be even more of a popular resort destination than it was when I moved here (sixteen years ago). And the last two years have turned this paradise into a hell for immigrant communities. Public transportation is hugely important to sustaining their livelihoods, yet the current system is nearly thirty years old and doesn’t take care of the needs of people in the area who rely on it, including the elderly, teens, and non-licensed drivers. It makes it very difficult for our clients to get around.

The Executive Director’s words are supported by those of the court appointed translator I interviewed, whose function is to help non-English speaking defendants navigate the criminal justice system, once they become ensnared in it, oftentimes because of issues related to transportation. Speaking directly of the bus routes that many of her clients were dependent upon before seeking out other illegal means of transportation and running up against the law, she said

I think public transportation is extremely important and that there's definitely not enough of it. It's not reliable, either. Sometimes the S92 bus goes from Montauk to East Hampton, sometimes it will drive right past a bus stop even when people are sitting there, and it only goes till seven at night and it doesn't run on holidays. Even when they (my clients) can get a bus from town to town, they still have to walk a lot to get to their exact destination, and they have to walk with their kids on the side of highways.

(See Figure 3-4 below.)

Figure 3:





## Transportation Related to Personal Matters and Family Health

Interviewee #1 does not own a car or possess a driver's license to operate an automobile; she is totally dependent on the public transportation system, as limited as it is. When asked if, in addition to the difficulties of getting to and from work, she has experienced similar difficulties getting to important appointments with her child, like doctors' appointments, she answered

Sometimes yes, so most of the time we arrive late. Sometimes, if I can't find someone to drive us, I have to walk with my daughter to get to where the bus is because it doesn't stop on the main road.

On account of the severe repercussions that could result if she were pulled over, Interviewee #2 only uses the car to get to and from work during the weekdays. For all other matters, including doctors' appointments for her and her children, she relies on medical transportation provided by OLA or the kindness of others. This reliance on outside organizations and individuals is a particular source of stress for the interviewee, given her family's medical profiles. In addition to two healthy teenaged children who require regular checkups, Interviewee #2 also has a mentally challenged newborn who requires significant medical attention to meet her various needs. This requires Interviewee #2 to constantly be soliciting others for transportation to and from doctors' offices and hospitals, leaving her worn out and frustrated but still determined to avoid any additional driving.

Interviewee #3 can never recall a time when the buses weren't predictably unpredictable; i.e., "No, it's (always been) the same thing." It was that sheer unpredictability that finally inspired her to go out and buy the car, which she shares with other members of her family.

(N)ow (that I have the car)...I'm taking care of my children and I use the car to take them to school and one of my children

works and I have to drive her to work so I use the car everyday for her too.

Interviewee #5 remembers having to rely on family and friends to drive him to appointments while he was growing up, many of them at risk of being pulled over and criminally charged for the service they were providing. This was before groups like OLA moved into the area and began providing free car service in order to help their clients make it to important appointments while limiting their criminal exposure.

Transportation Advocate & Outreach Coordinator, OLA:

As transportation advocate and outreach coordinator, I take people to their medical appointments. I think for everybody, it's important to have these services that you can trust and rely on but, unfortunately, in this area, there is not an efficient transportation service. I think that we need more buses and more lines that don't just go to the main streets. And the train is not a way to go for anything. Since I work as a transporter for medical appointments, I can say that it's very difficult for people to get to their appointments in winter time and it's very hard for people to walk with their children in the cold. That's why I have the job, so that people can get to their appointments on time.

### **Transportation Related to Fears of Deportation**

In the past, Interviewee #1 has been stopped and questioned by the police when riding in a car driven by a friend to one of her appointments. The encounter left her shaken and more determined than ever to stick with the bus routes, despite their unreliability and the inconveniences they impose on her life. Law enforcement, she believes, is biased against

undocumented immigrants like herself and quick to lend a hand to ICE officials, who undermine her stability in this country with the constant threat of deportation.

I feel like the police are more aggressive with Latino people and if a white person did it (driving to an appointment) they wouldn't stop them. I feel like it would be the same with ICE. I haven't seen them but people talk about it and I've heard stories of police officers who come to their door and ask for information and then the police come back for everyone in the house. That's when ICE comes in and takes everyone in the house.

Even with her efforts to avoid apprehension while driving illegally, Interviewee #2 has had a run-in with law enforcement in the past, a run-in that speaks as much to the ever-present threat of criminal prosecution as it does to the arbitrary application of existing laws.

Question: Have you ever had any interaction with local law enforcement when you were driving or taking the bus?

Answer: Yes, they pulled me over for a broken headlight and gave me twenty-four hours to change it.

Despite her good luck with the headlight incident, Interviewee #2 remains wary of the stepped up police presence on the east end and anxious about the spectre of ICE.

Question: Do you feel like the number of police has increased since you've been living here?

Answer: Yes, a lot more police officers.

Question: Have you ever seen any ICE officers in the community?

Answer: I heard that ICE comes to your house and knocks on the door but I never experienced that and hope it never happens to me.

Question: Do you feel safe living here?

Answer: I feel better than the people that told me about their encounters with ICE.

Interviewee 3's relative lack of caution is born out of necessity; she is currently battling cancer and has adopted a "by-any-means-necessary" attitude in order to try and beat her diagnosis, both for herself and for her children. If she needs to see a doctor, then she's not going to rely on a bus that might never come. That attitude is underscored by the fact that Interviewee #3 is a rare exception to the rule in my research group, a non-U.S. born citizen who has managed to attain a limited license. Her license eligibility was triggered by the fact that she is currently in the process of acquiring legal asylum.

These developments are only as of late and the interviewee can still recall a time when she was pulled over while driving without a license, in a car that wasn't her own. The incident remains to this day the biggest obstacle towards finalizing her asylum.

Question: Do you ever get nervous about driving here?

Answer: No. But when I didn't have a license, yes. I was caught twice without a license and am still going to court for it now. Once I was driving to Sag Harbor and had a bad reaction to something I ate so I was swerving and a cop stopped me and gave me a ticket for swerving and also not having a license.

Despite her cancer battle and ongoing struggles with the legal system, Interviewee #3 appreciates how fortunate she is to currently hold a license to drive and to live in a town that she alternately describes as "beautiful" and "very good," where "everything is better here" than it was back in Honduras. Her partner, however, who does not have a license and who is not seeking asylum, is far less at peace with their living situation than she is. As with many of the other interviewees, the presence of ICE officials in their community affects their daily decision making.

I hear that ICE was all over the area --- Springs, East Hampton --- and I heard that they were taking people from areas where they would wait for work outside. Yes, I feel safe, but my partner does not feel safe.

Given his unorthodox working schedule and system's inability to deal with seasonal fluctuations, Interviewee #4 made the decision some time ago to rely on his own vehicle to commute both to construction sites but also to most of his personal appointments. And while he maintains a confident attitude about the decision he's made to drive, his demeanor noticeably changes when questioned about his previous run-ins with the law.

Question: Have you ever had any interaction with local law enforcement when you were driving or taking the bus?

Answer: Yes, they (the police) stopped me because I didn't use my blinker because it wasn't working. And my registration was wrong once and I had to fix it...And the only thing I hear from people that I could notice a little is that I saw a lot of people from Spanish ethnicity get stopped from the police. And I know the population is big but at certain times it seems like eighty percent of people that are stopped are Spanish from the police.

Exactly how Interviewee #4 "saw a lot of people from Spanish ethnicity get stopped from the police" or how he was able to arrive at the conclusion that "eighty percent of people that are stopped are Spanish" is obviously subject to debate. What is not subject to debate is the common impression among the subjects I interviewed that there is a strong police bias against residents in the area of Latin-American ancestry; a bias that, in many opinions, rises to the level of overt racial profiling. It is this commonly shared impression of bias that goes towards fueling the omnipresent fear of ICE agents in the community, a shared fear that undermines the peace of mind even of a subject as confident as Interviewee #4.

I've never seen ICE in the area. But even if ICE isn't coming around, people are scared about it and hearing stories about it (from one another)...I'd like to be safe in every area not just here. Sometimes, though, you never know if you're safe or not. I feel safe in a way, for the reasons that I've already said. But other things everywhere have to be more safe...

From his father, Interviewee #5 notes how the risk of police interaction has only increased in recent years, as law enforcement efforts have been stepped up to identify illegal drivers. "My dad works late," he reports, "and he sees that there's been more police over the years." The interviewee was fortunate to move away from Riverhead before the presence of ICE in his community became most acutely felt with the political decision making coming out of Washington, D.C.

In Riverhead, I hadn't seen anything. But there were a few "7-11" (convenience stores) a few years back that were raided by ICE. But I've heard in Flanders that it's happened, too. More businesses now have to be careful with their workers.

The increased police presence and the threat of ICE intervention have drastically altered the way Interviewee #5 thinks of the east end town in which he once grew up, discouraging him from wanting to ever return on a full-time basis.

Question: Do you feel safe living here?

Answer: I did for most of my life there. But when I left, that's when ICE started. So I was glad I was moving away.

Those who work with advocacy groups like OLA are keenly aware that their clients are oftentimes forced to seek out extra-legal forms of transportation, despite their best efforts to assist them by providing such help as free car service when drivers are available. "Though it kills me to say it," the Executive Director admits, "I know that many of our clients drive without a

license, though the risks are so severe. Because there really are no options and they have to drive to connect themselves to basic needs of life like food, doctors' appointments, and work." Of the potential legal ramifications that may result on account of this behavior, she went on to say

They're nervous because the risk is so great that they could be pulled over and found to be driving without a license. And there is the chance that they could be sent by a local judge to the county jail, where there is a tight alliance with ICE and a greater risk of detention because of it.

A regular staff member at OLA, who deals with the organization's clients around transportation matters on a daily basis, added a more detailed description of the potential penalties undocumented drivers face if they are pulled over by law enforcement.

A lot of people who drive without a license understand the risk but it's the only way for them to get around, so that they can get to work or where the buses won't go. If you're not working in a town, it's going to be difficult to get to work. But they all feel nervous about getting a 511, which is aggravated unlicensed operation of a vehicle. It's a misdemeanor, punishable by thirty days in jail and a fine no less than two hundred dollars. And a 511A, which is lending a vehicle to someone without a license knowingly, runs them the risk of being arrested.

Should the undocumented be arrested for either charge and entered into the system, the penalties they could potentially be made to suffer are more far-ranging than those that would be faced in a similar situation by a legal citizen. The Transportation Advocate & Outreach Coordinator for OLA sees these fears of maximum penalties, including deportation from the U.S., reflected in the attitudes and conversations of the clients she frequently chauffeurs. She

also sees it in the informal network of notifications that her clients participate in in order to help keep themselves and those they know out of the hands of law enforcement.

They say that they freak out when they see a police officer behind them or hear that there's a checkpoint. They call each other and make sure everybody knows about it because they are afraid. They are afraid that someday they are going to get in trouble and then be deported.

The Chief Human Rights Attorney for OLA summed up the interplay between risk and punishment that many undocumented individuals on the east end negotiate on a daily basis when he said

It's not easy for these people (undocumented residents) to get around using public transportation. As a result, a lot of people drive without a legal license. And they're nervous, of course. They're nervous about being stopped by the police or being deported. Our clients have had interactions with law enforcement, not surprisingly.

### **Summary Observation: Directly Affected**

It was made clear to me during my interviews with each subject that they have all been significantly affected by the limited public transportation options available to them on the east end of Long Island. The decision each one was compelled to make as to whether to drive illegally or not was grounded in demonstrable economic necessity, rather than in any instinct for material acquisition for its own sake or empty status seeking. Every interviewee I spoke to indicated their discomfort with breaking existing laws and their desire, if given the opportunity, to function and contribute as law abiding residents of this country that they have made their home and in which they already offer so much.

Because of this, it's worth including the answers that each interviewee gave to the final question on my interviewer's sheet.

Question: Where do you like living more (the United States or your native country)?

Interviewee #1: East Hampton, because it's more calm here and I know a lot more people here and if I see a friend driving, they'll stop and pick me up. And there are a lot of people who will give me a ride because they understand.

Interviewee #2: Here.

Interviewee #3: I like living here better but I wish that I could have a house so I could be totally happy.

Interviewee #4: Here, because it's very interesting, the diversity, and it's like the center of the world, and that's very interesting. And there's a lot of energy here, and that's a good thing.

Interviewee #5: Riverhead, because it's the land of opportunity and accessibility, and I would never give that up.

### **Summary Observation: Indirectly Affected**

Based on their various professional experiences working with the undocumented community of eastern Long Island, each one of the the interviewees in the indirectly affected category had come to the conclusion that the only logical and ethical solution to the community's transportation problems was to allow them access to state-issued legal drivers' licenses, for many of the same reasons expressed in my "Conclusion."

**Lack of Public Transportation:**

**How Transportation Shortages Lead to Group Vulnerabilities and Related Insecurities**

Conducted as late as April of 2019, the South Fork of Long Island boasts only a single railroad line and three operative bus routes to residents who do not otherwise own or operate an automobile. The Long Island Railroad, a branch of New York’s Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA), makes its westernmost stop in the town of Hampton Bays and continues to travel for approximately thirty-four miles to the easternmost point at Montauk. The 10B and 10C bus lines service points exclusively on the South Fork, while only the S92 line extends beyond the researched area to points along the North Fork.

*Figure 6:*

10B Service					East Hampton, Springs to Bridgehampton						
East Hampton Railroad	East Hampton Pantigo Place	East Hampton Oak View Hwy Winstead St.	Springs Three Mile Harbor Rd. Gardiners La.	Springs Hog Creek Rd. Kings Point Rd.	Springs Springs Fireplace Rd. Gardiner Ave.	East Hampton Springs Fireplace Rd. Jackson St.	East Hampton Pantigo Place	East Hampton Railroad	Bridgehampton Commons East	Bridgehampton Commons West	East Hampton Railroad
6:50	—	6:58	7:06	7:12	7:18	7:31	7:39	7:51	8:13	8:18	8:40
8:00	8:10	8:17	8:24	8:29	8:35	8:48	8:56	9:06	9:29	9:34	9:55
9:00	9:10	9:17	9:23	9:28	9:33	9:45	9:53	10:03	10:33	10:38	11:04
10:05	10:15	10:23	10:30	10:35	10:40	10:52	11:00	11:08	11:35	11:40	12:17
11:15	11:25	11:32	11:39	11:43	11:48	11:59	12:07	12:17	12:43	12:48	1:10
1:20	1:30	1:38	1:46	1:50	1:55	2:07	2:15	2:24	2:48	2:53	3:17
3:30	3:40	3:48	3:55	4:00	4:05	4:17	4:25	4:35	5:03	5:08	5:36
5:45	5:55	6:02	6:09	6:14	6:19	6:31	6:39	6:49	7:17	7:22	—

10B service available Monday thru Saturday only.

AM-LIGHTFACE PM-BOLDFACE

Schedules subject to change without notice.

Suffolk County cannot assume responsibility for inconvenience, expense or damage resulting from timetable errors, delayed buses or failure to make connections.

Where to Board For your safety, please wait for the bus at a designated bus stop.

**10B Connecting Bus Service**

Route No.	Location
S92	Bridgehampton
10C	East Hampton Railroad
	East Hampton Village
	East Hampton Railroad

**Long Island Rail Road**

East Hampton – Montauk Branch

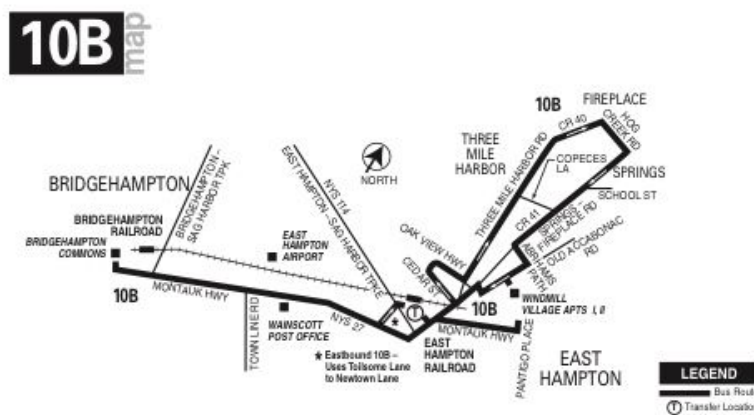


Figure 7:

10C Service		East Hampton, Montauk Village, Montauk						
East Hampton Railroad	Amagansett Montauk Hwy, Miankoma La.	Montauk Hither Hills State Park	Montauk Montauk Village	Montauk Montauk Dock	Montauk Montauk Village	Montauk Hither Hills State Park	Amagansett Montauk Hwy, Conklin La.	East Hampton Railroad
---	---	---	---	6:30	6:45	6:53	7:04	7:14
7:14	7:30	7:41	7:56	8:10	8:25	---	---	---
---	---	---	8:35	8:50	9:40	9:49	10:00	10:09
10:14	10:28	10:39	10:55	11:08	11:31	---	---	---
---	---	---	11:41	11:56	<b>12:46</b>	<b>12:55</b>	<b>1:06</b>	<b>1:15</b>
1:20	1:44	1:55	<b>2:09</b>	<b>2:22</b>	<b>2:43</b>	---	---	---
---	---	---	2:53	3:07	3:56	4:07	4:19	4:27
4:32	4:45	4:56	5:08	5:21	5:39	5:50	6:02	6:11
6:26	6:42	6:54	7:07	7:21	8:10	8:21	8:33	8:42

10C Connecting Bus Service Route No.	Location
10B	East Hampton
S92, 10B	East Hampton Railroad

**Long Island Rail Road**  
 East Hampton – Montauk Branch  
 Montauk – Montauk Branch

AM-LIGHTFACE PM-BOLDFACE

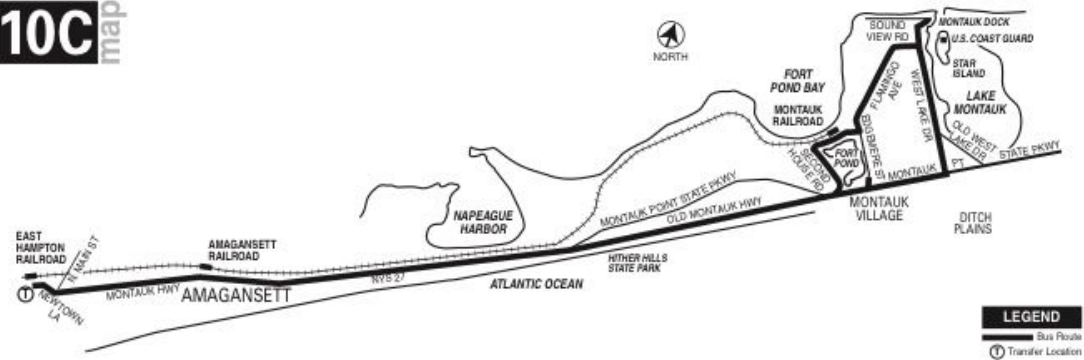
10C bus service available 7 days a week, including Sundays, Memorial Day, Independence Day and Labor Day.

Schedules subject to change without notice.

Suffolk County cannot assume responsibility for inconvenience, expense or damage resulting from timetable errors, delayed buses or failure to make connections.

Where to Board For your safety, please wait for the bus at a designated bus stop.

**10C** map



While the interviews I’ve conducted later in this study will speak with greater specificity to the inconveniences of having such little transportation options available to a non-driving population trying to maintain their jobs, it should be apparent that the bus and train lines were not programmed to service this population at all. Analyzing the latest schedules shows that these routes were designed exclusively for the weekend and tourist traveller.

Hypothetically consider an unlicensed, undocumented worker, employed in one of the agri-businesses in the area, who has to travel from Hampton Bays to Montauk in order to arrive at their regular job for a nine o’clock start time. There is only one train available for them to take, the 8:26 a.m., which would not get them to their destination on time. They would be

showing up 19 minutes late to work each day. Should they put in a regular work day until five o'clock, that same worker would have to wait at the station in Montauk for the 10:05 p.m. train before starting their commute back home. And while the combined schedules for the three bus lines obviously provide more options, the vast empty spaces on the map of the region demonstrates just how little they service the full area under consideration.

**Figure 8:**

From **Hampton Bays To Montauk**

Depart	Arrive	Transfer	Leaves	Trip Duration	
8:26 AM	9:19 AM			53 mins	Off Peak
10:11 AM	11:04 AM			53 mins	Off Peak
1:29 PM	2:22 PM			53 mins	Off Peak
3:16 PM	4:14 PM			58 mins	Off Peak

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**Figure 9:**

From **Montauk To Hampton Bays**

Depart	Arrive	Transfer	Leaves	Trip Duration	
4:50 PM	5:43 PM			53 mins	Off Peak
10:05 PM	11:08 PM			1 hrs. 3 mins	Off Peak

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The scarcity of reliable public transportation routes available to undocumented Latino groups can be shown as a significant contributing cause towards exposing them to other related social disadvantages. Since they are unable to obtain a driver's license, they have little other option than to drive illegally because of these inefficient transit systems. This causal connection between lack of access and illegal conduct can be exploited as a reason by law enforcement and government agencies to take further police-state actions against already vulnerable groups, as was proved in Arizona in recent history. Senate Bill (SB) 1070 allows law enforcement agents to turn a traffic stop into a deportation proceeding in Phoenix (Strauss, 2016). This bill makes undocumented Latino groups more susceptible to being pulled over while driving illegally, detained, and ultimately processed for deportation (Strauss, 2016). These traffic stops are the primary way ICE has of seizing and separating so many families because of the local authority's alliance with ICE in their jail systems (Strauss, 2016). The system established in Arizona can logically be expected to repeat itself on Long Island should current trends continue.

Not only does inadequate public transit lead to vulnerability for these Latino populations by forcing them to drive illegally, it also allows vulnerabilities to develop in their everyday existence. A study done in Georgia on "food insecurities" within migrant worker groups that had H-2A visas, which allow a foreign national entry into the United States for temporary or seasonal agricultural work, and those who didn't have them, who were in the country illegally (Hill, Moloney, Mize, Himelick & Guest, 2011), showed that "transportation problems" were one of the main causes of "food insecurities" throughout these groups, putting the workers at a 5,287 times increased risk for "food insecurity" (Hill, Moloney, Mize, Himelick & Guest, 2011). "Food

insecurity” bred from transportation scarcity is as much a cause for concern in Latino communities on Long Island as it is for the migrant worker population of Georgia.

***Conclusion:***

On the April 15, 2019 opinion page of *The New York Times*, the editors come to the same conclusion that every person I interviewed has reached, both the directly affected and the indirectly affected; that New York State should once again begin re-issuing licenses to undocumented immigrants. The *Times* editorial was published in response to legislation currently pending before the state government, which would no longer require that applicants for a driver’s license show proof that they are in the country legally; a foreign passport would be sufficient to have a license issued, as had been the case up until the events of September 11, 2001.

The editorial makes several arguments for why the newspaper has decided to endorse the new legislation. First, it points out that there are an estimated 725,000 undocumented immigrants in New York State, making up more than five percent of the labor force in 2016 and contributing something like \$1.1 billion in state and local taxes each year. It also notes that issuing drivers’ licenses to this group would add as much as \$26 million to state revenue in the form of license applications, car registrations, and gasoline taxes. Finally, it acknowledges that law enforcement officials, including the current police commissioner of New York City, have admitted that knowing who is on the road is a “clear benefit” and could “reduce the number of hit-and-runs, increase the number of insured motorists and, by having identification on record, help fight crime and terrorism” (Blue, 2019).

The *Times* editorial ends with an interview they conducted with an undocumented forty year-old Mexican construction worker named Aldo, who lives with his wife and young son on Staten Island. While he lives some distance away from the subjects I interviewed, the thoughts and emotions Aldo expressed to the writers sounded familiar to theirs. Living far from public transportation, Aldo chooses to drive in the area, even knowing the risk that he runs of criminal prosecution and worse. Aldo confesses to living in a state of constant anxiety, however, based on this decision. “‘They know you don’t have a license,’ he said of the police, ‘and you’re fearful’” (Blue, 2019).

Like the editors of *The New York Times*, doing the background research for this paper and interviewing the people affected by the same issue, I have come to the conclusion that undocumented immigrants living on the east end of Long Island should be allowed access to licenses because:

1. Public transportation in this area is provably inadequate to serve as a viable alternative to issuing licenses;
2. The undocumented community is otherwise forced to resort to illegal driving practices, risking their own safety and security and the safety of others;
3. The undocumented community already contributes to the state by way of taxes and should be equally entitled to receive the full benefits of their tax dollars;
4. Law enforcement efforts would be assisted by knowing the identities of every driver on the road, whether they be natural born citizens or undocumented immigrants.

Figure 10:

A22

Opinion

The New York Times

**EDITORIAL**

## Let Undocumented Immigrants Drive

As long as Washington remains unable to deliver comprehensive immigration reform, states will be left to decide how to deal with the millions of undocumented immigrants who are a part of their communities and the work force.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo of New York and the now Democratic-led State Legislature recently agreed to let undocumented immigrants apply for state financial aid to attend college, tapping a pool of talent and giving more young people a chance to fully participate in American life.

There are an estimated 725,000 undocumented immigrants in New York State, making up more than 5 percent of the labor force in 2016, according to the Pew Research Center. They pay \$1.1 billion in state and local taxes each year, the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy estimates.

Almost 250,000 of them live in the suburbs and upstate, where people rely on cars to get to work and school. That's why the governor and legislative leaders have proposed legislation to let undocumented immigrants receive driver's licenses, as a dozen states and the District of Columbia do.

Under legislation pending in Albany, applicants would no longer be required to show proof they are in the country legally. They could use foreign passports to establish their identity and obtain a standard driver's license, once, of course, they pass the same tests as everyone else.

**Proposed legislation in New York could extend the right to thousands and even help to make the state's roads safer.**

Though researchers say it is hard to isolate a single factor when studying road safety, law enforcement officials have said that knowing who is on the road is a clear benefit. William Bratton — who served as police commissioner in both Los Angeles and New York — has supported such measures, saying they would reduce the number of hit-and-runs, increase the number of insured motorists and, by having identification on record, help fight crime and terrorism.

One 2017 study found hit-and-run accidents in California decreased by an average of 7 percent to 10 percent after undocumented immigrants were allowed to get driver's licenses. After New Mexico approved similar legislation, the percentage of uninsured drivers fell to 9.1 percent in 2011 from 33 percent in 2002.

Issuing licenses to undocumented immigrants would also bring the state more revenue. The Fiscal Policy Institute estimates New York could see about \$26 million in fees for license applications and car registration, and the gasoline tax.

Opponents say the state should not make it easier for immigrants who are here illegally to work jobs they are not supposed to have. But the bill would reflect reality: Undocumented immigrants are already driving on the state's roads.

New York once allowed undocumented residents to drive. But after the Sept. 11 attacks, Gov. George Pataki, citing the threat of terrorist infiltration, issued an executive or-



←

VICTOR J. BLUE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Aldo, an undocumented immigrant from Mexico City living on Staten Island, hopes to get a driver's license.

der requiring applicants to prove their legal status before obtaining licenses. In 2007, Gov. Eliot Spitzer tried to restore these rights but backed off in the face of intense political blowback.

Along with Mr. Cuomo, the Assembly speaker, Carl Heastie, and the Senate majority leader, Andrea Stewart-Cousins, have signaled support. But Ms. Stewart-Cousins may have a tough time persuading Democrats from Long Island, where anti-immigrant sentiment can be strong.

For those who have to work and raise their families in the shadows as they provide cheap labor for contractors, restaurants, farms and factories, a driver's license could change their lives.

Aldo, a 40-year-old Mexican working illegally in construction and the food industry, lives with his wife and young son on Staten Island's South Shore, far from public transportation. It's an area the couple chose because the schools are good and it's affordable.

But he said driving in the area increases his chances of interacting with law enforcement. He stands out in a neighborhood where most residents are white, and there are few other immigrants.

"They know you don't have a license," he said of the police, "and you're fearful."

Keeping people like Aldo fearful doesn't make anyone else safer. Giving them the right to have a driver's license makes sense.

3

**EDITORIAL OBSERVER** BINYAMIN APPELBAUM

I have come to this conclusion having interviewed only ten subjects and it's a fair criticism of my study that the sampling group wasn't large enough to reach such a significant summary finding. Further studies should obviously be conducted to incorporate more direct anecdotal information from those most affected by the issues discussed. Nevertheless, based on what I learned from the interview subjects I had, I believe that the reasoning behind my conclusion is sound and demonstrated in every word of the testimony they provided to me.

But while I believe that my conclusion is logically arrived at, given the four arguments listed above, a fifth argument, as compelling as the four others combined, naturally occurs to me after sitting in a room with my interview subjects and listening to their stories --- that it is morally unethical for any just society to exploit a group of people living in its midst while simultaneously exposing that same group to unnecessary harm and fear. Like many, including the editorial staff of *The New York Times*, I believe that the United States, as the most powerful democracy on the planet, has the moral responsibility to act on behalf of all those in need. I believe that this moral responsibility extends both to individuals naturally born here in this country and those who arrived here illegally, seeking freedom from violence and a better way of life.

## *Appendix*

### *Interview Questions:*

- Tell me a little bit about where you live.
  - Do you like living here?
  - What do you like most?
  - What are the biggest challenges about living here?
  - How long have you lived here?
  - Has it changed a lot since you first moved here?
  - Do you use public transportation on a regular basis?
  - If so, for what purposes do you use public transportation?
  - How important do you think public transportation is to maintaining your job?
  - Do you think there are enough public transportation options available to you?
  - Do you feel like you can rely on the public transportation system? (Why is that?)
- Explain)
- Has the public transportation system changed since you moved here?
  - What does your daily commute look like?
  - Are you able to get to important appointments such as the doctor's appointments... financial appointments... appointments involving your children?
  - Have you ever been bothered or harassed while taking public transportation?
  - Do you have a car available to you for transportation purposes?
  - Do you drive? How often? When?
  - Do you ever get nervous about driving here? Why?
  - Have you ever had any interaction with local law enforcement when you were driving or taking the bus?
  - Do you feel like the number of police has increased since you've been living here?
  - What about ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement)? Have you ever seen them around?
  - Do you feel safe living here?
  - Do you feel at home here
  - Where did you live before here?
  - Was it very different? How so?
  - Where do you like living more?

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