

Economic Policy Institute Forum

Transporting Black Men to Good Jobs: Transportation Infrastructure, Transportation Jobs, and Public Transit

Michelle Holder

Senior Labor Market Analyst

Community Service Society of New York

September 26, 2012

NOTES TO POWERPOINT PRESENTATION

INTRODUCTION

Before I discuss black male employment in the transportation and construction sectors in New York City first I'd like to lay out the scope of unemployment among black men in the city as a background for why this forum is so important.

SLIDE 2

By race and ethnicity the recession's impact was the harshest for black men in New York City. This slide shows that even before the recession began (the official start of the recession was December 2007) black men's unemployment was high at 9 percent. By the time the recession ended, however, it had reached about 18 percent, meaning almost 1 in 5 black men in New York City were unemployed at recession's end. This is really depression-level unemployment and had the country as a whole reached this level of unemployment it would have been considered catastrophic. Also note that the absolute percentage point increase in black male unemployment was the highest at 9 percentage points.

SLIDE 3

Let's look at where black men currently stand in New York City's labor market. It has improved and last year black male unemployment in the city declined to 14.6 percent. The decrease in the black male unemployment rate since the end of the recession was similar in size to the decrease in the Latino male unemployment rate—3.3 percent versus 3.2 percent respectively. However, at 14.6 percent black male unemployment in New York City is still the highest of all

race/ethnic/gender groups even though that group had the largest absolute decline in their unemployment rate in the post-recession period on the city.

SLIDE 4

I also want to mention the issue of long-term unemployment and its impact on unemployed black men since long-term unemployment has become an entrenched feature of the post-recession landscape, and extended unemployment insurance benefits subsidized by the federal government are due to expire at the end of this year. By race and ethnicity long-term unemployment impacts the black community the most in New York City. So it's not just that unemployment is high among black men, but the amount of time black men spend being unemployed has lengthened. As you can see from the chart almost 60 percent of unemployed black men in the city are out of work long-term, defined as being unemployed for more than 6 months; this percentage is the highest among all male race and ethnic groups. Therefore it's critical that policies are targeted at get black men re-employed.

SLIDE 5

I'd like to talk now about the size and scope of primarily the transportation sector and secondarily the construction and manufacturing sectors in New York City. First let me point out that both are relatively small--- the transportation sector only accounts for 2.6 percent of all workers in the city, and the construction and manufacturing sectors combined account for only 4.8 percent of all workers. The largest sector employing the most workers in New York City is the education, health services, and social assistance sector which employs about one in every five workers in the city. Also in this sector black men are proportionally employed, meaning that almost 20 percent of employed black men work in this sector in the city. However, bear in mind that overall wages in this latter sector tend to be low.

SLIDE 6

This slide has a chart showing the distribution of employed men in New York City by industry. Focusing in on transportation, construction and manufacturing you'll see that these industries are male-dominated. If we go back to the chart in the previous slide you'll see that transportation only accounts for 2.6 percent of all jobs, but in this chart it shows that 8.5

percent of all employed males in the city work in this industry. You'll see a similar trend in the construction and manufacturing sectors when comparing the two charts.

SLIDE 7

This slide has a chart showing the distribution of all employed black men in New York City by industry. There are some interesting findings here. First you'll see that 15.5 percent of employed black men in the city work in the transportation sector, and 11.2 percent work in the construction and manufacturing sectors. It's clear from this chart that black men are over-represented in the transportation sector in New York City. But what's also interesting is that 11.2 percent of employed black men work in construction and manufacturing. So as Algernon Austin pointed out, the construction sector is still an important source of employment for black men. However, in comparing this chart to the previous chart you'll see that whereas 8.5 percent of employed men in New York City work in the transportation sector, practically double that share of employed black men work in the same sector. But 13.4 percent of all employed men in the city work in construction and manufacturing, whereas only 11.2 percent of black men work in that sector.

SLIDE 8

This table shows that among the industrial sectors in New York City where black men are over-represented it appears the transportation sector has the highest average wage.

SLIDE 9

This table shows that even though black men are well represented in the transportation sector there are still disparities in their representation in the higher-paying occupations versus the lower-paying occupations within this sector.