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Transportation Affordability in the Mountain West

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TRANSPORTATION AFFORDABILITY IN THE MOUNTAIN WEST

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PURPOSE

This Fact Sheet highlights “The Most and Least Affordable Cities For Public Transit”¹ in the Mountain West. Extracting from Paul Reynolds’ analysis of over 70 transit system across the United States from 2014 to 2015, this fact sheet focuses on data for the 7 municipalities in the Mountain West: Albuquerque, NM; Ogden, UT; Boulder, CO; Phoenix, AZ; Las Vegas, NV, Salt Lake City, UT, and Denver, CO.

ABOUT THE DATA

According to the original report, “Transportation Affordability” is defined as the proportion of income (%) for a city commuter to purchase the least expensive 30-day unlimited transit pass, calculated as a cost-share of a city residents’ median monthly income.

Cities are categorized by size, according to the number of residents dwelling within city limits. Large cities include those with populations over 700,000, mid-sized cities have populations between 250,000 and 700,000 residents, and small cities are those with populations under 250,000.²

KEY FINDINGS

1. Albuquerque, NM ranks as the most affordable Mountain West city for public transit (with a cost-share of 1.5%), where a pass costs less than half (\$30.00) the national average (\$67.07).
2. Denver, CO ranks lowest in the Mountain West for transit affordability, based on the proportion of income (4.4%) for the average commuter to purchase a 30-day unlimited pass.
3. Among mid-sized cities, residents of Las Vegas, NV have the lowest median income (\$19,088), compared to Albuquerque, NM (\$23,865) and Denver, CO (\$27,092).
4. Among small cities, Ogden, UT residents have the highest median income (\$34,036), compared to Salt Lake City, UT (\$23,289) and Boulder, CO (\$30,097).

Table 1 shows public transit affordability for cities of the Mountain West, using data from 2014 through 2015. The categories included are: the price of a 30-day unlimited pass, the median annual and monthly income of residents in each city, and the proportion of that income that it takes to purchase a monthly transit pass.

¹ Paul Reynolds, Value Penguin, “The Most and Least Affordable Cities For Public Transit,” December 2019

² One consideration for this data is that population figures and categorizations of scale (city size) are based upon city-limits versus metropolitan statistical areas. This results in cities like Salt Lake City, UT, for example, appearing to be a small city despite its 1.15 million population at the metro scale in 2014.

TABLE 1: PUBLIC TRANSIT AFFORDABILITY IN MOUNTAIN WEST CITIES, 2014-2015

Size	U.S. Affordability Rank	City	Price of 30-Day Unlimited Pass	Resident Median Annual Income	Resident Median Monthly Income	Proportion of Income (%)
Mid-sized	4	Albuquerque, NM	\$30.00	\$23,865.00	\$1,988.75	1.5
Small	22	Ogden, UT	\$83.75	\$34,036.00	\$2,836.33	3.0
National Average³			\$67.07	-	-	3.2
Small	42	Boulder, CO	\$99.00	\$30,097.00	\$2,508.08	3.9
Large	43	Phoenix, AZ	\$64.00	\$19,454.00	\$1,621.16	3.9
Mid-sized	46	Las Vegas, NV	\$65.00	\$19,088.00	\$1,590.67	4.1
Small	54	Salt Lake City, UT	\$83.75	\$23,289.00	\$1,940.75	4.3
Mid-sized	58	Denver, CO	\$99.00	\$27,092.00	\$2,257.67	4.4

Source: Adapted from Paul Reynold's *Most and Least Affordable Cities for Public Transit* and U.S. Census Data, 2014-15.

³ The National Average for the costs of a 30-day transit pass is calculated using the average of the 73 transit systems analyzed in Paul Reynold's *Most and Least Affordable Cities for Public Transit*.