The Racial and Income Gap in Commuting for Work After COVID

This presentation draws from LSE’s Economic Inequality Series blog “Understanding the Racial and Income Gap in Commuting for Work Following COVID-19” by Ruchi Avtar, Rajashri Chakrabarti and Maxim Pinkovskiy. The views expressed here are those of the presenter and do not necessarily represent those of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York or the Federal Reserve System.
What We Ask?

- Were there differences in commuting to work patterns by race and income following the pandemic?

- We differentiate between:
  - Low Income versus Higher Income communities
  - Majority Minority versus other communities
  - Commuting for full-time versus part-time work
  - National versus regional patterns
Data and Definitions

**Data**

- SafeGraph’s anonymized cell phone mobility data to identify commuting for full-time work or part-time work

**Definitions**

- Low Income counties → counties in the lowest quartile of the (population-weighted) median household income distribution
- Majority Minority counties → counties where at least half the population is Hispanic and/or non-Hispanic Black
Differences in Commuting to Work Patterns By Income
Decline in Commuting for Full-Time Work Markedly Lower in Low Income Counties
Decline in Commuting for Part-Time Work Perceptibly Lower in Low Income Counties
Differences in Commuting to Work Patterns By Race
Decline in Commuting for Full-Time Work Lower in Majority-Minority Counties
No Perceptible Difference in Commuting Patterns for Part-Time Work in Majority-Minority Counties
Main Takeaways

- COVID-19 pandemic associated with large decline in workers commuting to work.

- Low-Income and Majority-Minority communities saw a perceptibly smaller decline in workers commuting to work.

- Reopenings associated with dramatic return to commuting for work which was noticeably larger in Low-Income and Majority-Minority communities.

- Findings suggest workers in Low-Income and Majority-Minority communities are more dependent on occupations that require commuting to work and that are less amenable to working from home.
Appendix
Decline in Commuting for Full-Time Work Starker in the Region

Differentiating by Income
Decline in Commuting for Full-Time Work Starker in the Region

Differentiating by Race