

# The Role of Transportation Barriers in Nutritional Disparities in Inglewood

Caroline Adela Sahagun | Spring 2025 | Xijing Li



## Introduction

Inglewood, a historically underserved area, faces a range of transportation barriers that contribute to food insecurity, particularly among low-income families. Families in this region often lack reliable and affordable transportation options, preventing them from accessing healthy food sources. The purpose of this research is to investigate how transportation barriers in South Los Angeles influence access to healthy food options for families, with a focus on low-income and transit-dependent populations. By using qualitative data, the study will explore the daily challenges faced by families in accessing healthy food and assess community and policy-level interventions aimed at alleviating these barriers.

## Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to examine how transportation barriers contribute to nutritional disparities in Inglewood, California. The research focused on elderly people, parents, caregivers, policymakers, and community leaders in food-insecure neighborhoods. Data collection included semi-structured interviews with community members and food retailers to discuss daily challenges in accessing healthy food and the role of transportation limitations. Surveys were conducted and focused on gathering data on food purchasing habits, transit use, and impacts on health. In addition, field observations were conducted across key neighborhoods and transportation corridors in Inglewood to document food retail availability, walkability, and access to public transit. Document analysis played a critical role in contextualizing these findings, drawing from sources such as the Inglewood General Plan, the Vision 2025 Plan, Transit-Oriented Development proposals, and Los Angeles County Public Health reports on food environments. Regional planning documents, including Metro's First/Last Mile Strategic Plan and LA County's Community Health Assessments, were also reviewed. Local data from the USDA Food Access Research Atlas and the Healthy Places Index helped identify areas of need and map disparities in food access.

## Key Findings

Category	Criteria	Evaluation (1-4)	Notes
Accessibility & Connectivity	Public transit to food		2 limited routes, long wait times
	Pedestrian Safety		3 lighting/crosswalks need improvement
	Bike Infrastructure		2 minimal infrastructure in key zones
Food Access	Grocery store availability		2 few full-service stores nearby
	Healthy food in stores		2 mostly processed items
Community Engagement	Community food programs		3 some food banks, low awareness
	Local business participation		2 limited engagement
Cultural Integration	Cultural Identity		3 few visible features
	Food-centered events		2 rare events, low turnout

## Interviews

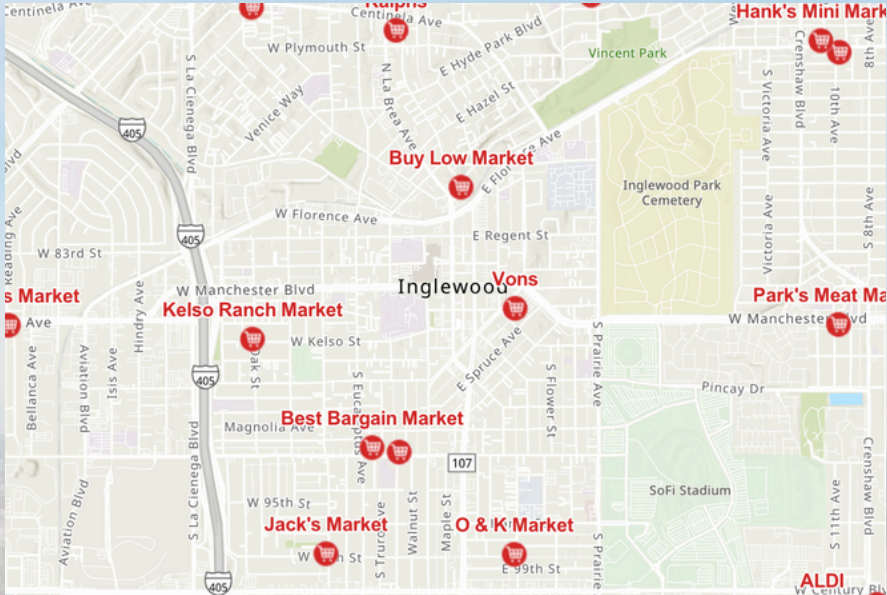
The most significant issues identified were long travel distances to grocery stores, high food prices, and limited healthy options at nearby retailers. Many respondents also rated poor transit reliability and safety concerns when walking or taking the bus as major obstacles.

## Document Analysis

Analysis of planning and public health documents revealed that Inglewood's land use policies and transportation infrastructure have not adequately prioritized food access for low-income residents. The Inglewood General Plan and Vision 2025 Plan highlight economic development and transit investments, but make limited reference to food environments. The Los Angeles County Community Health Assessment and USDA Food Access Research Atlas identify Inglewood as a food desert, with high concentrations of fast food and liquor stores but limited full-service grocery stores. This disconnect between planning goals and on-the-ground food access conditions reinforces nutritional disparities, especially in neighborhoods with poor walkability and insufficient transit connections to healthy food retailers.

## Conclusion

Transportation access plays a crucial role in shaping the nutritional health of communities. In Inglewood, the limited reach of public transit and low vehicle ownership rates significantly reduce access to affordable and nutritious food options. This lack of mobility disproportionately affects low-income and minority populations, exacerbating health disparities and deepening food insecurity. Addressing these challenges requires an integrated planning approach that prioritizes transit-oriented development, expands access to school- and community-based food programs, and encourages investment in underserved neighborhoods. Solutions must also involve local stakeholders and policymakers in crafting sustainable, equity-focused interventions that close the food access gap. By mapping transportation limitations alongside food deserts and socioeconomic data, we can better visualize the intersection of urban planning and public health and ultimately advocate for more inclusive systems that support community well-being.



<https://storymaps.arcgis.com>

The grocery store locations are mostly clustered along major thoroughfares, leaving interior residential neighborhoods with reduced access. Food accessibility may be limited, particularly for residents without reliable transportation, as many stores are easier to access by car than by walking or transit. The scarcity of large, produce-focused retailers combined with the proximity of fast-food establishments also creates a food swamp effect in parts of Inglewood, where unhealthy food options outweigh healthy ones.

## Recommendations

- 1) Similar to models in other cities (like LA's Healthy Neighborhood Market Network), Inglewood could offer subsidies to small retailers to improve refrigeration, carry fresh produce, or partner with local farm
- 2) Support community-based mobile grocery stores or food delivery programs targeting seniors and families with limited transit options. Partner with local nonprofits and farmers' markets to bring fresh produce directly to underserved neighborhoods ( Los Angeles Food bank, The Good Food Foundation, Mothers in Action)
- 3) Integrate food access priorities into city planning and Metro's First/Last Mile strategies. Ensure transportation projects consider health impacts and prioritize connectivity to fresh food retailers
- 4) Collaborate with city officials to implement zoning policies that limit the concentration of liquor stores in vulnerable neighborhoods, balancing the retail food environment

ECONOMICALLY VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES HAVE MARGINAL ACCESS AND OPTIONS TO HEALTHY AND QUALITY FOODS IN NEIGHBORHOOD STORES AND RESTAURANTS.

