

Researcher shows affordable housing not so affordable when transportation costs soar

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Shima Hamidi, a UTA assistant professor in the College of Architecture, Planning and Public Affairs, has published research on how affordable subsidized housing is when transportation costs are factored in. Credit: UT Arlington

The availability of public transportation and the cost of individual transportation play major factors in just how affordable subsidized housing is in North Texas and across the country.

Shima Hamidi, a University of Texas at Arlington assistant professor in the College of Architecture, Planning and Public Affairs, published a study in *Housing Policy Debate* journal that assesses the affordability of U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development rental assistance properties from the perspective of transportation costs.

The study examines how location affects affordability in reality.

"What we discovered is that many of these locations around the U.S. that don't have [public](#) transportation don't really offer [affordable housing](#) because residents have to purchase a car, insurance and spend time commuting," Hamidi said. "It becomes a social equity issue. The ability to get to quality jobs or schools is limited because some of the people can't afford it because of the transportation costs."

Hamidi collaborated with Reid Ewing, professor and director of the Metropolitan Research Center in the College of Architecture + Planning at the University of Utah.

"The study recommends that public entities have to locate affordable housing where public transit is available or offer transportation subsidies so people can afford cars and insurance," Hamidi said.

Nationally, the research discovered that 44 percent of 8,857 affordable housing units studied had occupants who spent on average more than 15 percent of their income on transportation costs.

Not surprisingly, the ratio of [transportation costs](#) to incomes for residents of affordable housing units rose dramatically in many areas without public transit.

Dallas was well above that 44 percent benchmark at 72 percent. Phoenix came in at a remarkable 97 percent. Buffalo registered at 84 percent. And Pittsburgh had 82 percent of its affordable housing units spending more than 15 percent of its household income on transportation.

Nan Ellin, dean of UTA's College of Architecture, Planning and Public Affairs, said Hamidi's research shines light on an important problem that could be fixed.

"Affordability is a misnomer if you don't consider additional costs associated with a housing location," Ellin said. "Dr. Hamidi's study illuminates these costs, offering decision makers a superior tool in the creation of truly affordable housing and healthy sustainable communities."

The project is representative of research excellence that is advancing UTA's commitment to improve [sustainable urban communities](#) under the University's [Strategic Plan 2020: Bold Solutions | Global Impact](#).

Hamidi also is director of the Institute of Urban Studies. Established by the Texas Legislature in 1967, the Institute has strengthened local economies and enhanced community planning for Texas cities, governments and public agencies by providing customized planning and management services while giving students relevant real-world experience.

Hamidi is a transportation planner and smart-growth advocate and, for the past five years, has been working on several funded projects from the Department of Housing and Urban Development, Transportation Research Board, National Institute of Transportation and Communities, American Association of Retired Persons, National Institutes of Health, and Smart Growth America. She has published extensively in the areas of urban sprawl and smart growth, transportation, urban design, walkability, housing affordability, public health, upward mobility as well as urban form and its quality-of-life impacts.

Her work has appeared in top planning journals such as the *Journal of American Planning Association*, *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, *Journal of Planning Literature*, *Landscape and Urban Planning*, *Health & Place*, *Journal of Urban Design, Environment and Planning B*, *Housing Policy Debate*, *Transportation Research Record*, and *Urban Studies*. The results of her research were also presented in a national press release in partnership with Smart Growth America and have been cited in more than 100 national and regional newspapers and magazines such as *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post* and CNN Money.

Provided by University of Texas at Arlington

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