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Evaluating the Role of Transportation and Potential Barriers to Food Access in Binghamton's North Side

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Recommended Citation

Zipman, Eric, "Evaluating the Role of Transportation and Potential Barriers to Food Access in Binghamton's North Side" (2021). *Research Days Posters 2021*. 37.
https://orb.binghamton.edu/research_days_posters_2021/37

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The relationship between transportation and food security around Binghamton's Northside

Special thanks to Professor Valerie Imbruce for her guidance and to the community members who engaged in this research

Background

Binghamton's Northside and the surrounding region have been long studied and recognized as a food desert, which are "low-income census tracts where a significant number or share of residents is more than ½ mile...from the nearest supermarket" (USDA). Paradoxically, there is a high saturation of food pantries and food outlets in this area, though this study reinforces that most outlets lack fresh produce and have limited inventories. Thus, access to reliable transportation is a necessity in getting to an outlet with fresh grocery items. This study looks at the Broome County Bus System's ability to connect its population to groceries.

Research Methods

- Interviews with members of community organizations relating to food security: CHOW, Binghamton Food Rescue (BFR), BU food pantry, United Presbyterian Church (UPC) food pantry, North of Main, et. al.
- Analyzing census data (2019 ACS estimates)
- Visiting/taking inventory of local food outlets and distribution sites via the BC bus

Interview Insights

- Emergency food aid like CHOW, BFR and UPC have engaged in food delivery to residents or those in temporary housing. Now due to limited capacity, CHOW is forced to **turn away people who call them but do not have a car to get to a pantry.**
- Getting the word out is an issue with food, transportation, and general community programs. **People also often keep to themselves and do not share if they have an issue, making it hard to gauge what specific barriers there are.**
- Small neighborhood groceries were common 30-40 years ago; then bigger groceries pushed out smaller ones. **Now what is left is many small, limited convenience stores instead of small groceries.**
- Some people will tend to go to an outlet that is closer rather than to a grocery farther away, even if fresh food is limited/not available. Those without a car must rely on car services or the bus.
- **There is an oversaturation of food outlets (stores, pantries), but limited selection of product.**

Fig. 1

Food Assistance & Vehicle Availability, by Census Tract and Block Group

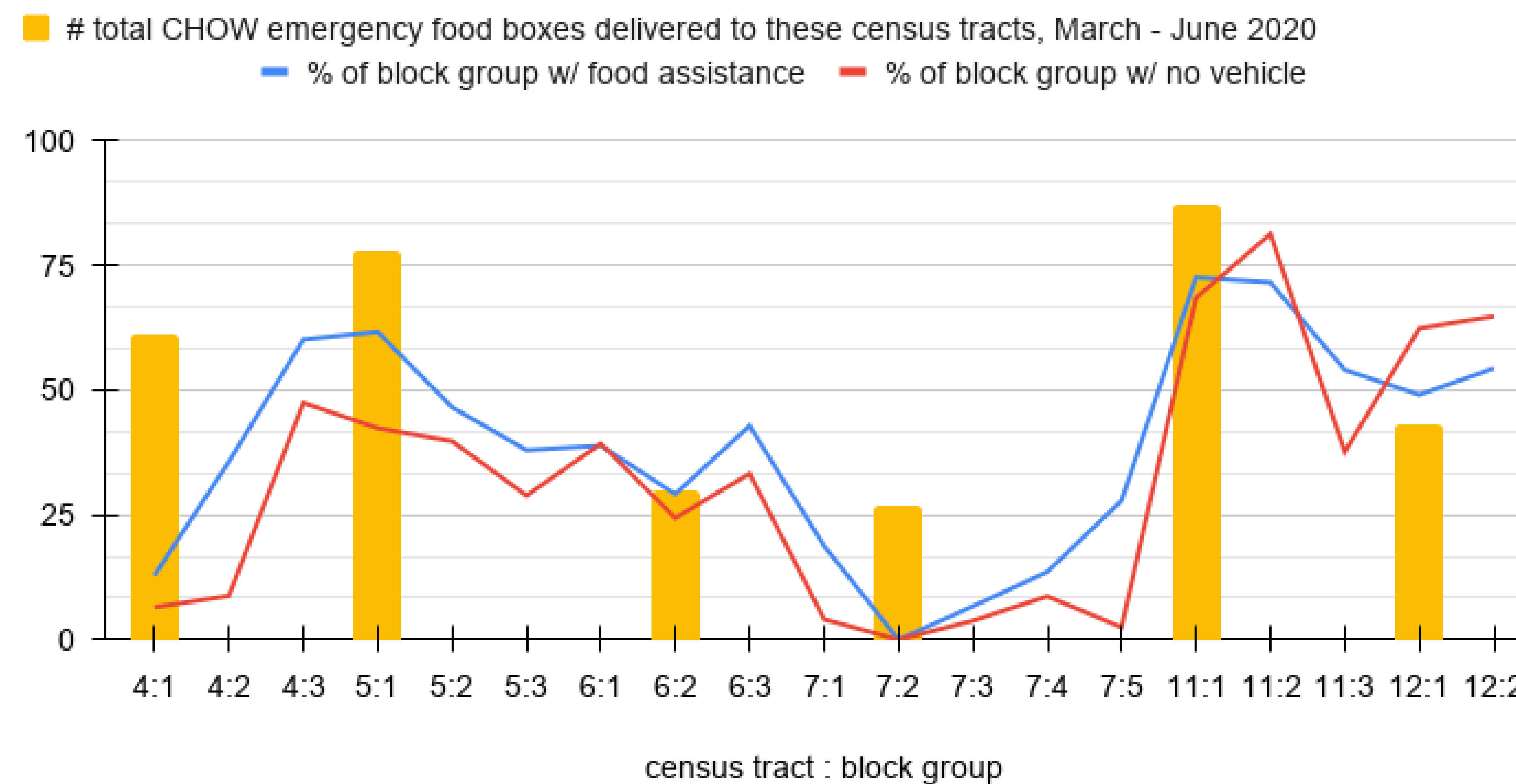
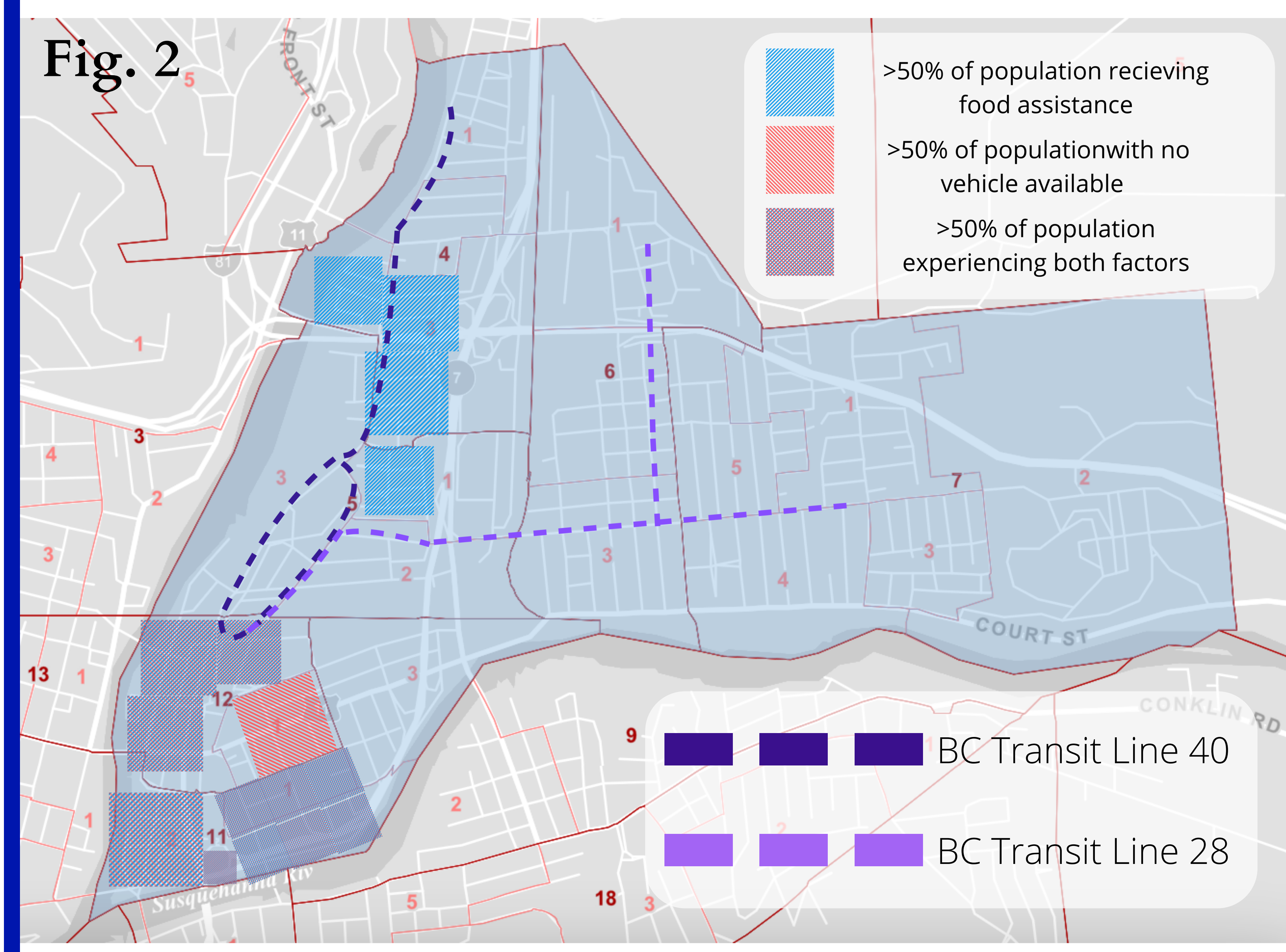


Fig 1.: Within the studied block groups, rates of food assistance (ie. SNAP) and no vehicle access tend to follow similar trends. Number of emergency food boxes delivered to these areas March - June 2020 also follows these trends.

Fig. 2 is a map of census tracts 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, and 12 (darker red numbers), and the 2-5 block groups (lighter pink numbers) that each are broken down into. Binghamton's Northside is contained in census tract 5 west of the highway and the southwestern part of census tract 4 block group 3.

Fig. 2



Conclusions

- **The graphs suggest a correlation between food assistance and not having a car, indicating potential reliance on the BC bus system.**
- **People fall on a spectrum of transportation and food aid need. For example, some people rely on pantries once in a while to supplement their groceries.**
- **Bus transit poses difficulties for those with mobility issues and physical limitations; also, only a few grocery bags can be carried on the bus.**
- **There are only two main bus routes that run in the study area (routes 40 and 28), and a limited number of food outlets with fresh produce and grocery items.**
- **There are other transportation programs running, but limited capacity, stigma, and lack of knowledge could be large barriers to use.**

Limitations:

- Research was not done directly with people experiencing food insecurity
- The census data used carried a large margin of error

For a map analysis of food outlets and further resources, please visit <https://tinyurl.com/BingFoodTransport>