



Silicon Valley Janitor Housing & Transportation Study

Alexandra Goldman

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Summary

This study surveyed over 230 janitors working in high-growth industries in Silicon Valley on where they live and how they commute. It finds that:

- *Janitors earn an average of \$25,000 annually and spend more than half their income on housing and transportation costs combined.*
- *Most janitors drive to work alone daily, despite living within a 30-minute commute of their worksites.*
- *Janitors do not find public transportation to be a viable option because:*
 - *80% work nights when there is no transit service available*
 - *Bus stops are located far from their home or workplace.*
- *Cars allow janitors to move easily between buildings during the course of a work shift, since many do not have access to the circulator buses and bicycles provided for other workers at many of the sites.*
- *Almost all janitors would ride a bus, however, if it were provided for free and conveniently located.*

More than half of the job growth in the Bay Area over the next eight years is anticipated to come from occupations earning less than \$50,000/year. As Silicon Valley moves towards greater sustainability in land use planning and development, it is crucial to consider these lower-wage workers who will be driving job growth, yet who cannot afford to live and commute in the area. This study of janitors in high-growth industries illustrates some of the unique housing and transportation challenges of the low-wage workforce and can help guide more equitable transportation and housing policy in the Valley.

Introduction

Over the next few years, Silicon Valley's economic engine, the high-tech sector, is expected to continue growing rapidly, bringing with it a high demand for service sector jobs. More than half the Bay Area's job growth will come from occupations earning less than \$50,000 annually (EDD 2012).¹ This job growth reduces unemployment across the Valley, but it also comes with a cost. Silicon Valley has three times as many jobs as houses, which sends housing prices soaring. There is an acute and mounting disconnect between the economic growth centers, and the availability of affordable housing and transportation. How low-wage service workers afford to live and commute in this blisteringly hot housing market will have significant implications for sustainability, equity, and broader regional planning in Silicon Valley moving forward.

In order to gain a better understanding of this growing sector of the service workforce, where they live, and how they get to work, we surveyed unionized janitors employed in high-wage and high-growth sectors in Silicon Valley. While there have been ethnographies and Census-based analyses of this population, there has not yet been an empirical study of their live/work patterns. In short, we found that many janitors

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commute daily alone by car, and live relatively close to their work, but that they pay more than half their income in doing so.

Our data shows almost all (85%) janitors drive to work, and only 8% use public transportation. Janitors drive largely because public transit is inaccessible, but also because private automobiles provide certain benefits. Public transportation is inaccessible due to the janitor's nighttime work hours and the inconvenient location of transit stops. Additionally, cars allow janitors the benefit of moving quickly and safely between buildings at their worksites, as they are often required to do during a shift. Janitors do not feel they can access some of the transportation amenities, such as commuter shuttles or on-site bike shares, which many of their worksites provide other employees. For the majority of janitors who drive, gas is very expensive, and, combined with car maintenance and tolls, constitutes 8% of their annual income

Housing comprises much of the remainder - 81% pay more than 30% of their annual income on housing, and 58% pay more than half their income on housing. The median income for the janitors is \$25,000 annually, so housing costs leave little room for other necessary expenses such as food or healthcare.

Most janitors also live in Silicon Valley, a 30-minute average commute from their workplaces. In order to afford living so close to work in an extremely expensive housing market, the janitors need to make other sacrifices: for example, almost half live in overcrowded homes with more than two people per bedroom.

This report will summarize some of the most relevant background on Silicon Valley before discussing the data from the surveys, and finish with some implications of the research.

Background

Silicon Valley stretches from just south of San Francisco to San Jose, approximately 50 miles away. Though the boundaries of the Valley are often contested (current debates include whether or not to incorporate San Francisco), this study will define Silicon Valley as the entirety of San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties.

Silicon Valley was formerly known as the "Valley of Heart's Delight" - fertile farmland until the middle of the twentieth century. To ensure the United State's readiness to combat a Cold War Soviet Union, the Federal Government invested heavily in defense technologies concentrated in Silicon Valley starting in the 1950s. Stanford University provided a steady flow of well-educated engineers to steward the defense funds, and the Valley quickly turned into a productive center for high-technology manufacturing in the 1950s and 1960s (Saxenian 1983, Walker 2006).

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Simultaneously, the Federal Government was also investing considerably in highways and home mortgages, spurring the rapid suburbanization of previously agricultural land across the country. Silicon Valley was no exception- most of the cities that comprise the Valley were built during the middle of the twentieth century and still feature the distinctive land use markers of that era: low density developments, relatively large lot sizes, and a reliance on cars to move around.

When the technology necessary for personal computers began to develop in the late 1970s, Silicon Valley already had the infrastructure necessary to become the hub of semi-conductor manufacturing throughout most of the 1980s. Immigrants, in particular from South and Central America, began coming to Silicon Valley in high numbers for the plentiful, relatively well-paying manufacturing jobs. Many of them settled in San Jose (Zlolniski 2006).

However, the promise of lower labor costs abroad eventually lured many of the manufacturing jobs away from Silicon Valley. Starting in the 1990s through the present, Internet companies became the region's distinctive economical engine. The loss of reasonably paying manufacturing jobs pushed many workers into far lower-wage service jobs. While production can be geographically outsourced, the need for security, food service, and clean buildings cannot be.

However many of these firms *did* outsource much of the risk and cost of managing a lower-wage workforce to subcontracting agencies. As Christian Zlolniski, an ethnographer studying immigrants in Silicon Valley, explains in his ethnography *Janitors, Street Vendors, and Activists: The Lives of Mexican Immigrants in Silicon Valley*, "in all cases, subcontracted manufacturing and service workers are legally separated from the client firms that either design the products they make or own the buildings where they work, which prevents them from receiving the same wages and benefits as the employees in those high tech firms." Most of the janitors working in the high growth sectors in the Valley are employed by subcontracting agencies instead of directly.

Many of Silicon Valley's high technology firms have been incredibly successful, bringing large amounts of investment and liquid cash to the area. This infusion of wealth has pushed up the cost of living in the region just after middle-class manufacturing jobs began leaving. The Valley has a bifurcated economy, with many wealthy and many low-income, but few in the middle, and an income disparity greater than that of the Bay Area and the State of California as a whole (Silicon Valley Index 2015).

This growing divide receives annual attention in the form of the Silicon Valley Index, a report written by Joint Venture Silicon Valley which discusses the region's progress on a variety of indicators, including employment and housing. The 2015 report opens by proclaiming, "The world's hottest regional economy just keeps getting hotter," yet

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tempers this declaration a few paragraphs later by discussing the “vexing” growing income inequality.

Several reports by Working Partnerships USA, including *Life in the Valley Economy 2012* and “The Janitorial Workforce in Silicon Valley” (2009), dive deeper into the data on the Valley’s growing income inequality. These reports illustrate the widening gap between the incomes of low-and-moderate income workers, and the incomes necessary to afford living in Silicon Valley. According to their calculations from 2009, in a two wage-earner family with two children, both parents must earn \$14.70/hour (\$19.36/hour adjusted for 2015 inflation) to meet their basic needs without assistance from the government, however most janitors are not earning nearly this much. They write, “How do janitors survive? By taking public assistance, accepting private charity, living in crowded or substandard housing, foregoing medical care and sinking into debt. This is the historical recipe for creating a permanent poverty class.”

Unfortunately, a limited housing supply and ineffective public transportation system makes living in Silicon Valley increasingly expensive, as explained in the report *Moving Silicon Valley Forward* by NPH and Urban Habitat (2012). The sprawling land-use patterns, vestiges of the highway-driven 1950s, make supporting a robust system of public transportation extremely difficult and costly. Silicon Valley *is* working to increase density and transit-accessibility- in 2014, 61% of newly approved housing is within a third of a mile to public transit (SVI 2015). However, as SPUR, a Bay Area urban policy thinktank, explains, “Transit lacks powerful political champions, and in the South Bay it has been typically presented as a social service rather than a mainstream transportation mode” (20). In Santa Clara County, for example, only 3% of all trips are by transit (Census 2010).

The landscape of transportation investment mirrors Silicon Valley’s income disparity. Far more money has been spent improving the light rail system - which serves higher-income residents- than the bus system- which is patronized by lower income residents (NPH and Urban Habitat 2012). A survey completed by Santa Clara County’s Valley Transit Authority shows that 68% of the riders on their bus system earn less than \$35,000 annually, while 50% of the riders of the light rail earn the same amount (Corey, Canapary & Galanis 2014).

Silicon Valley is also in the midst of a housing crisis that impacts households at all income levels. According to recent analysis by the California Housing Partnership Corporation (2014), San Mateo County has a shortfall of 23,775 houses affordable for low-income families, and Santa Clara County has a shortfall of 53,810 houses. Not surprisingly, housing prices are extremely high and rising. Rents are around \$2,300 (SVI 2015); a household would need to earn more than \$93,300 annually to afford this rent. Housing prices are also way beyond the reach of lower-income households at close to \$760,000.

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Lower income households in Silicon Valley, like lower income households elsewhere in the country, engage in a balancing act in regards to their two largest expenses- housing and transportation. Many studies (Lipman 2005, Roberto 2008, CTOD & CNT 2006, among others) have illustrated the direct tradeoff between housing costs and transportation costs for many low income households. These studies have found that, on a national level, as households move further from their worksites they see a reduction in housing prices and a correlating, albeit smaller, rise in transportation prices. Households then must make their own calculations- do they value a shorter commute, but more expensive housing? Do they value a safer neighborhood, but a longer commute? etc. Housing and transportation together play integral roles in affordability for lower income workers. This study will continue to investigate some of these questions.

A note on the study population

For this study, a researcher hired by the Equity Collaborative, part of Plan Bay Area's Regional Prosperity Plan,² collaborated with the Service Employees International Union-United Service Workers West (SEIU-USWW) who represents over 40,000 workers across California including janitors, security guards, and airport service workers. SEIU-USWW represents approximately 1,200 janitors working in high-tech companies in Silicon Valley, and unionizes the subcontracting agencies. None of the janitors included in this study are directly hired, but instead are hired by subcontracting agencies who negotiate contracts with high-tech companies.

After persistent investigation, we learned that the size of the non-unionized janitorial population is very hard to determine. Most of the large tech campuses use these subcontracted, unionized janitorial services. The non-union population can be more often found in small, diffused offices, and may be directly hired. Future studies should attempt to capture this more elusive population, but it is beyond the scope of our research here.

While this sample is only representative of Silicon Valley's unionized janitorial population, it is safe to assume that the unionized population has better salaries and overall working conditions than the non-union population (Long 2013). Thus, the results of the survey will paint a more conservative portrait of the housing and transportation options for Silicon Valley janitors.

We exclusively surveyed janitors working at "high-tech" companies in Silicon Valley, which include Internet companies such as a Google, bio- and medical technology companies such as Genentech, and more traditional technology companies such as Apple.

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We focus on high-technology companies in Silicon Valley for several reasons. First, high-tech is driving the job growth in Silicon Valley. Jobs in “innovation and information products & services” grew faster than any other job segment in Silicon Valley between 2010-2014 (SVI 2015). As this sector grows and expands, so will the demand for janitorial services. Second, high-tech makes Silicon Valley’s economy unique. As discussed above, a confluence of factors have made Silicon Valley the site of the lion’s share of the nation’s technology innovation. Third, high-tech is the site of extremely dramatic income inequality- skilled technology workers in Silicon Valley are easily earning five or six times as much as the janitors. Such sites of income inequality demand further inquiry.

The recent disclosure of many of these companies’ racial demographics makes this study salient as well. Only 2-3% of the workers at companies including eBay, Facebook, Google, LinkedIn and Yahoo (who are included in this study) are Latino (WPUSA 2014). Whereas, according to our survey data, Latinos comprise almost 100% of the janitors employed in these companies. By comparison Silicon Valley’s population overall is 26% Latino (2013 1-year American Community Survey). In the high-tech sector, the Latino population is dramatically overrepresented in low-paying jobs, such as janitorial work, while being underrepresented in higher-paying jobs. Any attempts to increase social equity in Silicon Valley should acknowledge and examine this racialized disparity.

Methodology

We created our survey instrument through conversation with union staff and others familiar with the target population. A copy of the survey in Spanish and English can be found in the Appendix. We designed the survey to be administered by trained union member both on the phone and in-person. As these members are part of our target demographic, they could immediately establish confidence and rapport with the interview subjects, and increase the likelihood of honest responses to potentially sensitive questions.

We used SEIU-USWW’s Member List to generate a random sample of research subjects. However since only a third of the janitors have listed phone numbers (and a smaller portion have listed, working phone numbers) we supplemented these random calls with in-person interviews at worksites and at the union hall, both to preserve the survey from bias towards solid union contacts (the more up-to-date the phone number, the more recently the union has been in contact with this person), and also to reach an appropriate sample size. We surveyed 234 janitors out of the 1,200 SEIU janitor population, putting our margin of error at +/- 6%, with a confidence level of 95%.

There are a couple potential sources of bias in our sample selection, however we feel confident that these biases will not negatively impact the representativeness of our sample. Our method of subject selection might lead to over reporting of subjects who

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live in San Jose (near the union office). However, through conversations with union organizers familiar with their population, we have confirmed that indeed most of the janitors do live in San Jose, and San Jose residents appear accurately represented in our sample. Our sample population might also be skewed towards janitors who have a better connection to the union. However, there is no substantive nexus between janitors who are more engaged with the union and any question on our survey.

Another potential limitation to our survey could be non-response bias. For several of our questions, we had a much lower response rate. We have noted this where relevant. In those cases our margin of error will vary between +/-6% and +/- 10%.

In addition to the surveys, we held focus groups with union members at the SEIU office in late January 2015. In our initial survey, research subjects indicated their willingness to participate in a focus group, and the participants were then contacted from these surveys. Focus group participants were compensated with a gift card for their time and participation.

Surveys and focus groups were administered in Spanish, and translation services were used to assist the researcher to analyze the data.

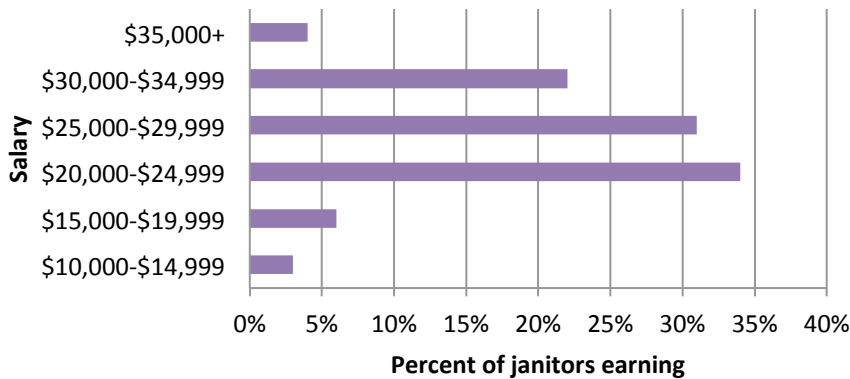
Basic demographics

Virtually all the janitors surveyed (233), except for one, are Latino, whereas in Silicon Valley only 26% of the population identifies “Hispanic” (2013 1-year ACS).³ As noted above, Latinos are overrepresented in the janitorial population.⁴ Most (65%) are female and 35% are male. The median age is 43, with the youngest at 21 and the oldest at 70.⁵

Most of the janitors work a standard 40 hours/week, and have been working with their current employer for a median of 7 years, with the longest at 25 years.⁶ Since the janitors work for subcontracting agencies directly, this duration of employment refers to their time with the agency, not necessarily the worksite (ie- Google, Cisco etc.).

The janitors report earning a median salary of \$25,000 per year.⁷ A breakdown of the salary data can be found below. By comparison the average salary for a tech worker in Silicon Valley was almost \$196,000 in 2014, nearly eight times as much (JLL Research).

Annual Income

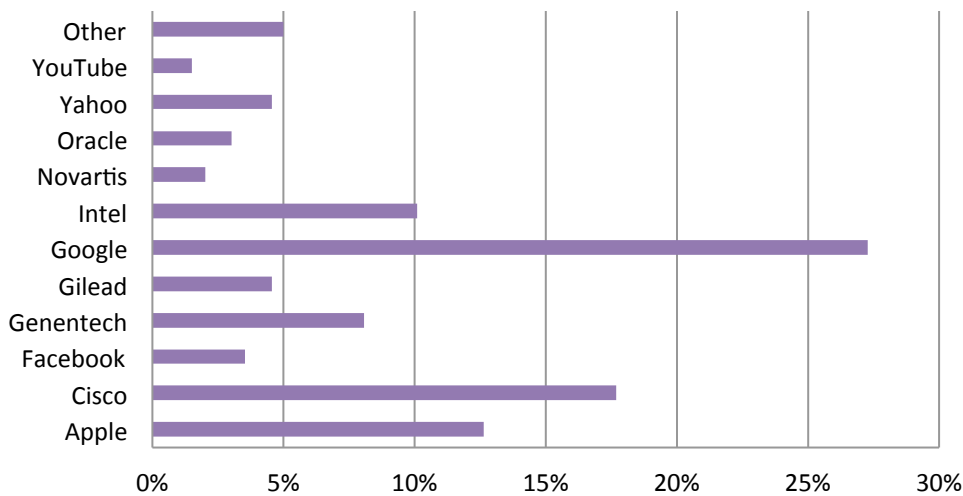


Where do they work?

The chart below represents the worksites that our survey draws from. Google, Cisco, Apple, Genentech and Intel are the most heavily represented in our survey population. According to Union records, our sample population’s worksites are representative of the overall workforce, with Google and Intel slightly overrepresented and Genentech and Cisco slightly underrepresented.

As mentioned above, these companies represent many of the larger high-technology, high-growth firms in Silicon Valley. They include internet-based companies (Facebook, Google, LinkedIn, Yahoo, and YouTube), bio and medical technology firms (Genentech, Gilead, Novartis, Nvidia, and Varian), and more traditional high-tech companies spanning consumer electronics, hardware, and software (Apple, Brocade, Cisco, Intel, Microsoft, Oracle, and Yaskawa).

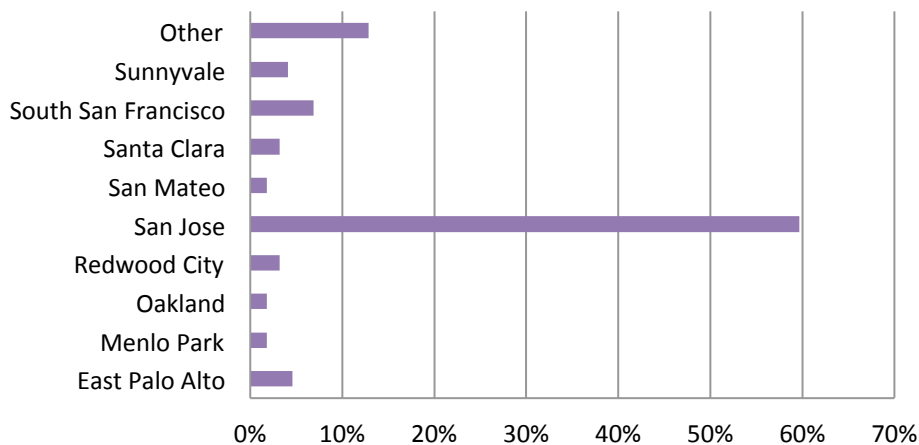
Companies Represented



Where do they live?

As mentioned above, the majority (60%) of the janitors surveyed live in San Jose. As Zolniski documents, many Central and South American immigrants settled in San Jose when moving to Silicon Valley in the 1980s and 1990s. South San Francisco is home to the next largest population at 7% and East Palo Alto at 5%.⁸ Small percentages of the janitors live in other locations throughout Silicon Valley and a smaller number live outside the Valley in cities such as San Leandro, Oakland, Newark and Modesto.

Cities of Residence

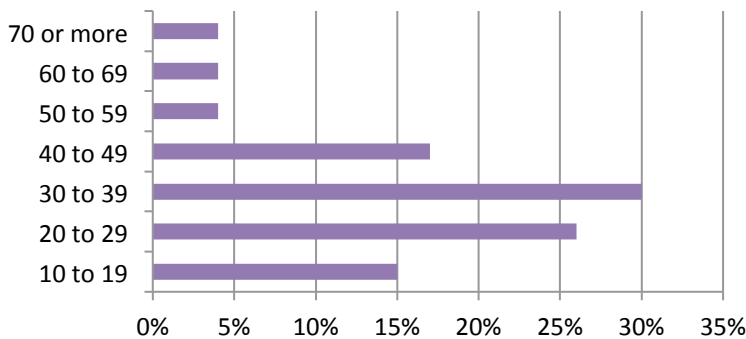


Commute and discussion

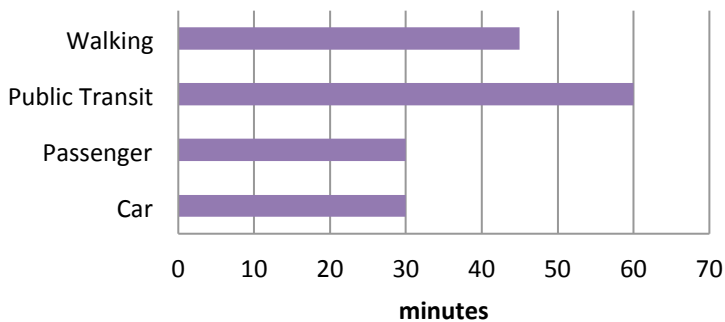
According to our survey, 85% of the janitors drive their own car to work, 13% commute as a passenger, and only 4% report not using a car (as driver or passenger) for any part of their regular commute. Of those who drive their own car, only 17% report carpooling on occasion. Additionally, 2% walk or bike and 8% use public transportation.⁹ The surveys allowed the subjects to select multiple transportation modes, assuming some many use multiple modes within one trip, and some may use different modes on different days. Accordingly, the numbers above total more than 100%. These numbers are generally comparable to Silicon Valley as a whole, where 85% drive or ride as a passenger and 11% take public transit (SVI 2015).

Commute time vary by mode. Car commutes take a median of 30 minutes,¹⁰ as do commutes as a passenger.¹¹ The few janitors who reported walking says it takes 45 minutes¹² and those who take public transportation take an hour.¹³

Commute Time In Minutes



Commute Time by Mode



According to an additional analysis of the addresses of 475 union members, the median distance traveled to work is 12 miles, which for all 1,200 USWW janitors would total to 514.1 metric tons of GHG emissions annually.¹⁴

On average, janitors reported spending \$40, or 8% of their income on weekly transit related costs, - which can include gas, tolls, car maintenance and bus fare.¹⁵ None of the participants explicitly mentioned insurance charges, nor the initial cost of buying and smog-checking a car, which could mean the costs are underreported. The cost of automobile transit is particularly difficult to measure, as maintenance and insurance costs can appear invisible on a weekly basis. However, our findings are relatively consistent with a study from the Brookings Institute (2008) which showed that the working poor spend about 6.1% of their income on commuting,¹⁶ and an Urban Institute analysis of American Community Survey data (2006) which illustrates that poor commuters spend 8.6% of their annual income on commuting. This is in contrast to higher-income workers, who spend only 2-3% of their annual income on commuting-related costs, according to these studies.

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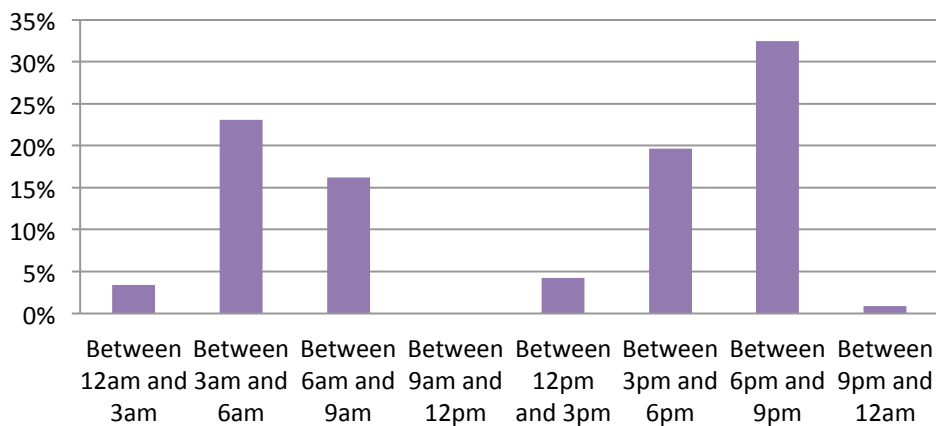
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The janitors reported that the expense of gas greatly limits how often they leave the house. One explained, “When I go out to get gas, I think about everything I need and I buy everything that same morning to not have to go out again.”

Although almost all of the janitors have access to and drive a car, one reports, “I have a car because it’s a necessity.” There are several notable reasons why cars appear to be the only viable option:

First- there is no transit during the hours when the janitors are commuting. Only 20% of workers both start and end work during regularly scheduled bus hours.¹⁷ One focus group participant explained, “It’s the only option because my schedule and the bus service schedule don’t match. I leave at 4:30am.” The chart below illustrates that 26% of workers leave for work before 6am, which is before many bus lines begin running for the day.¹⁸ While the remaining workers may be able to take a bus to work, the 53% who start work after 3pm will be unlikely to be able to catch a bus when they leave their shift, since many buses end service around 11pm.

Hour leaving for work



Second, there are not transit stops convenient to their homes and/or worksites. One janitor explained that despite having a bus stop near her home, she would still need to disembark and walk 30 minutes to her job. Corporate campuses in Silicon Valley have generally followed the lead of the mid-century sprawling land use patterns and placed their offices in large, relatively inexpensive lots, generally removed from existing transit lines.

Third- many janitors have to move between buildings on their worksite’s campus during their shift, and without a car this can be difficult. One janitor lamented, “I don’t know why companies make us work four hours here, four hours there when they could assign

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the eight hours only in one place, when they know people don't drive." The distance between buildings can be over a mile, and it can feel unsafe for those working at night (which is the majority, see chart above). Genentech does offer a circulator bus that travels between the company's buildings (and to the Millbrae transit station), and janitors are allowed to ride this bus for free. However, the bus stops service at 8pm every night.

Some janitors also expressed a wish that they could use the bicycles that certain companies provide from their employers to move between buildings at night, but, they say, "We are even told about the bikes that we can't use, because if we do, we get scolded. They tell us themselves that we, janitors, cannot use the bike service."

Fourth- several janitors report feel safer when commuting in their own car. One explains, "I'm always afraid because it's dark at [the time of my commute], I'm afraid someone will attack me because I am alone on the bus. And there was a time when a girl who is my coworker was sent to another building, and somebody hit her on the head to steal her phone." However, driving can also put them at risk. Some report frequently being stopped by the police at night when they are leaving their shift. "Even the sheriffs stop us to find out why we are out at night... Why are you here? Where are you coming from? Where are you going? Why at this time?"

Fifth- driving a car is often faster. Although many janitors complained about traffic and the uncertain commute times that can result from an unexpected event or accident, our survey illustrates that commuting by public transportation is twice as slow as commuting by car. One explains "I like the bus, now I do! It's just the issue that they always arrive late. It's a long time to be waiting there." Since they often work through the night, several focus group participants wished the bus were a viable option in order to get some sleep while commuting.

Recently, the free shuttles that many Silicon Valley employers provide their workforce have been in the news. These shuttles bring workers from a few blocks of their homes in the northern parts of the Bay Area to their jobs in Silicon Valley. While many janitors had never heard of the corporate shuttles, those who had believed it was a service only offered to directly-hired employees and they were not allowed to use it. However 96% of janitors said they would ride a bus if it were free and offered stops convenient to their home and work.¹⁹

Housing and discussion

Our data shows that the vast majority (95%) of janitors employed in Silicon Valley also live in Silicon Valley. They are trying to make ends meet in one of the most expensive housing markets in the country on only \$25,000 a year.²⁰ At that salary, a janitor who is

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the sole wage-earner for a household can only afford a \$625 monthly rent or mortgage payment... however medians rents in Silicon Valley are close to \$2,300 (SVI 2015).

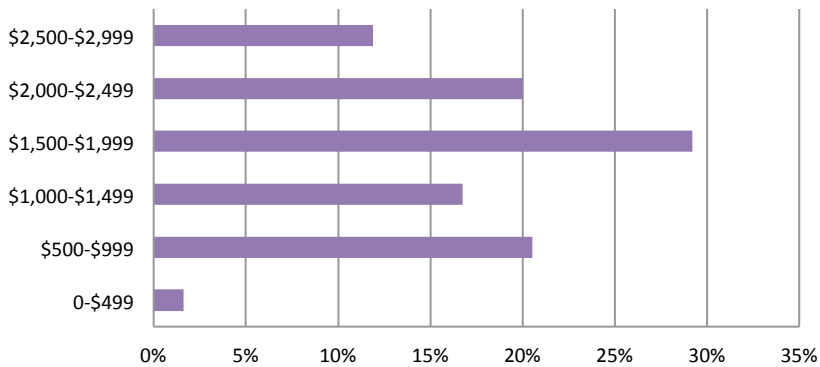
Our data suggests that janitors decide to live closer to work to have a shorter commute, rather than live further in less expensive exurbs and have a longer commute. However, it is possible that due to the high cost of both housing and transportation in the Bay Area, this is not a meaningful trade-off. According to studies (Lipman 2006), after a distance of 12-15 miles from work, housing savings begin to be eclipsed by additional transportation costs. As illustrated above, these janitors live an average of 12 miles from their worksites. If the janitors cannot afford housing within a 12-15 mile radius of their worksites, moving further away may yield no additional financial benefits.

A focus group participant explains, "I feel that the area where we live it's easier to find employment. It's an area with many advantages to find employment for the young people who arrive, as well as for older people...Even though it's a very expensive city." Another janitor explained that she chose where she lives because of "the convenience of having work nearby, distances not too far away, [it is] sustainable. Because of the issue we cannot look for jobs far from home, because gas is so expensive." The expenses of housing and transportation are intimately linked.

Most of the janitors surveyed (87%) rent a home.²¹ In San Mateo County and Santa Clara County, by contrast, the majority of residents are homeowners- 60.3% and 56% respectively (2013 1-year ACS).

Living closer to work in the expensive Silicon Valley can come with some significant downsides. The median monthly rent or mortgage payment for the janitors is \$1,675 a month,^{22 23} and rents are going up. In order to afford this rent, a household would need to earn \$67,000 annually, or more than two and half times the annual janitorial salary. One janitor explained, "rent has gotten higher, it's double what it used to be." Another said, "When we added up all our expenses, we realized that we are working just to keep up with the rent. In reality, if we want to do something extra for the family, we can't. So, we are not working for our family. We are working for the system and this is a huge frustration."

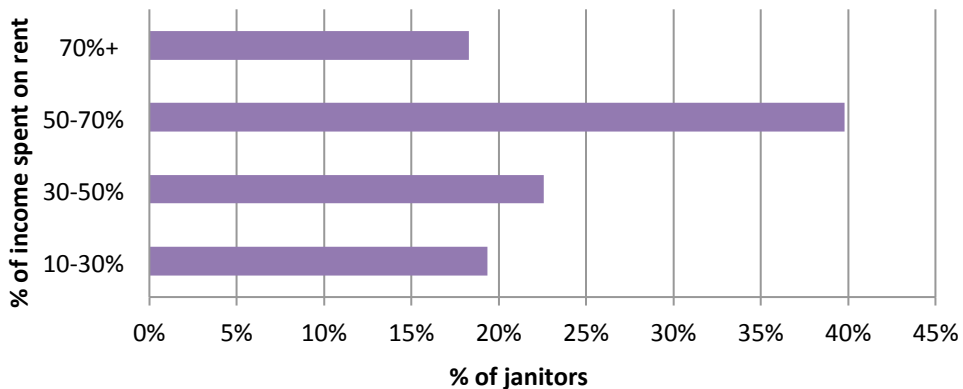
Monthly Rent/Mortgage Payments



In the focus groups, janitors cited the importance of living in San Jose, which has rent control, over neighboring Santa Clara, which does not. Although, unfortunately, San Jose does not have “just cause” eviction protections, which means that although a landlord cannot raise the rent arbitrarily, a landlord can evict tenants for almost any reason at all. In Silicon Valley, only San Jose, East Palo Alto, and Los Gatos have rent control policies.

Unsurprisingly, given the high rents and low incomes, most janitors (81%) are paying more than 30% of their annual income for rent or mortgage payments (“overpaying”) and a majority (58%) are paying more than 50% of their annual income for rent or mortgage payments (“severely overpaying”) ²⁴ When households overpay on housing, they need to cut back on other essentials such as groceries, healthcare, and transportation. One focus group participant, who lives with her two daughters and earns \$1,400 a month explained, “I live in one bedroom and it costs more or less \$1,200, \$1,300... It’s too much for one bedroom. That’s what I earn... How am I going to pay my bills? I’m going to pay the rent and I’m not going to eat.”

Housing Cost Burden



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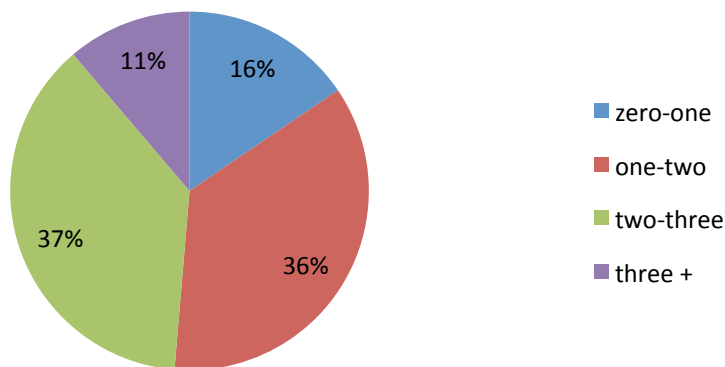
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One way that households try to make ends meet in an expensive market is adding extra people to an already crowded home. Many (49%) of the janitors live in overcrowded conditions of more than two people per bedroom.²⁶ Overcrowding can have many negative impacts on a physical and mental health, and can be particularly detrimental for children (Bailey 2011). Households in general are larger among our surveyed population- with a median of 4 people per household versus Santa Clara's average of 2.95 and San Mateo's of 2.85 (2013 1-year ACS).

Expensive housing markets can make it even more difficult for women or families in domestic violence situations to leave and seek safety (National Network To End Domestic Violence). One focus group participant reported moving with her daughters into a household of eight people in order to make ends meet after she decided to leave her husband.

Though many of these larger households consist of extended family, janitors may also take on a non-family housemate. While an extra person may help make payments, it can also be emotionally taxing and can feel too risky with kids in the house: "You never know who you bring into your home, even if they have recommendations. You never know who comes into your home."

People Per Bedroom



In order to maintain affordable housing, many of the janitors have to move regularly. One explains, "I arrived and I like it here, right? Because of work. But regarding everything else, I live like the poorest people live. I am in one place, I am in another, and in another because I can't stay where I live, and I move. I have been here for twenty years" and moved 5 times. Another explains, "Sometimes I live with my sisters, sometimes I live with friends, it depends. Anywhere I can pay. "

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Some take more extreme measures to afford living here, from living in substandard conditions to cutting back on necessities. One says, “Where I live we have a dirt floor, there is no pavement.” Another explains, “I think the most difficult thing I have done is to stop eating. I think that was the hardest thing, when I arrived in this country I never imagined I would have to do something so so cruel or so difficult or so hard. Waiting to go into a room where I work so they would not see me taking out an apple from the trash.” Others report having to dramatically change eating habits, only eating tortillas with nothing to fill them with.

Additionally, many of our focus group participants mentioned that they often work two jobs. Many of them will work a janitorial shift at night and work cleaning homes in the daytime. Needless to say, they report being tired all the time in order to afford their living situation.

Conclusions

This study has looked at the housing and transportation opportunities and constraints, for a sector of the low-wage workforce living and working in one of the wealthiest and most expensive areas of the Country. Studying Silicon Valley janitors working in high-tech companies can help policymakers plan to sustainably accommodate a demographic that is likely to continue to grow, according to projections by the State of California. Looking at this population can also reveal some of the income- and race-based inequalities that are increasingly a hallmark of Silicon Valley’s economy.

This study has shown that janitors choose to live closer to work to save on transportation costs, and for that many are forced to sacrifice on housing. Most are paying more than half their annual income on housing related costs. Janitors also need to make other trade-offs such as living in overcrowded, substandard conditions or taking on additional renters in order to make ends meet. With an extremely low salary of \$25,000 annually, the janitors are very vulnerable to fluctuations in the housing market. Ultimately, this points to the urgent need for more affordable housing in Silicon Valley. It also suggests that other tenant protections, such as rent control or just cause eviction protection, could be crucial for stabilizing this population.

Silicon Valley janitors live relatively close to their worksites, despite being located in one of the most expensive housing markets in the country. From a regional planning perspective, this could be great news: sustainable communities are enabled when households can live and work in reasonable proximity. At best, households who live close to work will generate less green house gas emissions and will have more time, money, and energy to dedicate towards building community, caring for their family, and other voluntary pursuits. However in Silicon Valley, an ineffective public transportation system, extremely expensive housing market, and growing financial inequalities post a significant barrier against reaping many of these benefits.

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The janitorial workforce could be an active user of local public transportation, since they live relatively close to their worksites. However, the structure of Silicon Valley's transit system means that public transportation is not a viable option for these workers. For many, the hours of work and availability of transit do not align. Additionally, public transit connections do not exist in and around many of the high-tech employment centers. Public transportation is clearly not meeting this sector's needs.

For many of these janitors, commuting by car appears to be the only viable option. Many expressed that they would prefer an alternative for convenience and financial savings... however alternatives are unavailable. Although many of the janitors' worksites provide transportation alternatives- bikes, circulator buses, longer-distance shuttles- the janitors' perception is that these amenities are not accessible to them. This could largely be a result of the subcontracting work arrangement of the high-tech industry's janitors.

While California Statewide Planning efforts are focusing on decreasing car-based GHG emissions, cars can be crucial to opening up opportunities for low-income workers, as our study illustrates. However, many studies (Waller 2006) document the extremely high opportunity cost of public transportation and the increased access to employment and better wages that cars can provide. Without substantial efforts to increase the availability of public transportation, cars are a crucial link to economic opportunity for the janitorial workforce.

Recently, several of the companies included in this study have revealed plans to dramatically expand their office campuses. These new plans represent an opportunity to combat the sprawling land use patterns that typify the Valley, and to provide jobs that are transit connected. These new plans also demonstrate that the number of people servicing these campuses, largely janitors, will continue to grow. As our study has shown, Silicon Valley's housing and transportation infrastructure is already not meeting the needs of these janitors. As this population grows, so does the need for systems that can sustainably accommodate them.

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End Notes

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- ¹ This data is for the Marin-San Francisco-San Mateo MSA and the Santa Clara-San Benito MSA- not just for Silicon Valley.
- ² “The Bay Area Regional Prosperity Plan is a three-year initiative funded by a \$5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC). As part of HUD’s Sustainable Communities Partnership Program, it aims to create stronger, more sustainable communities by integrating housing and jobs planning, fostering local innovation and building a clean energy economy.”
(<http://planbayarea.org/regional-initiatives/Bay-Area-Prosperity-Plan.html>)
- ³ n=234
- ⁴ It is possible that janitors working in different industries have slightly different racial dynamics. A report by WPUSA (2014) claims that only 69% of the janitorial population in Santa Clara County is Latino. However, our conversations with SEIU-USWW staff confirm that the racial demographics of our sample are reflective of the demographics of their membership.
- ⁵ n=190
- ⁶ n=188
- ⁷ n=148
- ⁸ n=218
- ⁹ n=222
- ¹⁰ n= 189
- ¹¹ n=29
- ¹² n=4
- ¹³ n=17
- ¹⁴ Using the EPA’s calculation of .00042 metric tons of Co2/mile x 24 miles/day x 5 days/week x 50 weeks/year x 1200 janitors x 85% (those who drive their own car to work, conservatively assuming those who carpool ride with that 85%).
- ¹⁵ n=129
- ¹⁶ Our research population, with an average income of \$25,000 annually, is lower income than the “working poor.”
- ¹⁷ Hours of service also vary by line- some buses do not begin running until 7am and may end as early as 8pm.
- ¹⁸ n=117
- ¹⁹ n=165
- ²⁰ n=148
- ²¹ n=212
- ²² In some cases this represents the total rent/mortgage paid for a housing unit, and in some cases it represents a rented room in a larger house.
- ²³ N=200
- ²⁴ n=93
- ²⁵ n=93
- ²⁶ n=187