

***How Does Leaving High  
Poverty Neighborhoods  
Affect the Employment  
Prospects of Low-  
Income Mothers?***

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The Three-City Study of Moving to Opportunity  
Presentation for the Employment and Housing  
Mobility Roundtable (July 9, 2007)

Annie E. Casev Foundation. Baltimore. Maryland



# How might relocation help?

- **Spatial mismatch:** relocating toward areas of job growth (in skill-appropriate jobs), e.g. growing suburbs.
- **Networks:** gaining social resources (social capital) useful for finding and keeping jobs.
- **Norms:** motivation from more work-supportive social climate

*But movers might lose social support for work, not have access to openings nearby, etc.*



## Interim Impacts: Results and puzzles

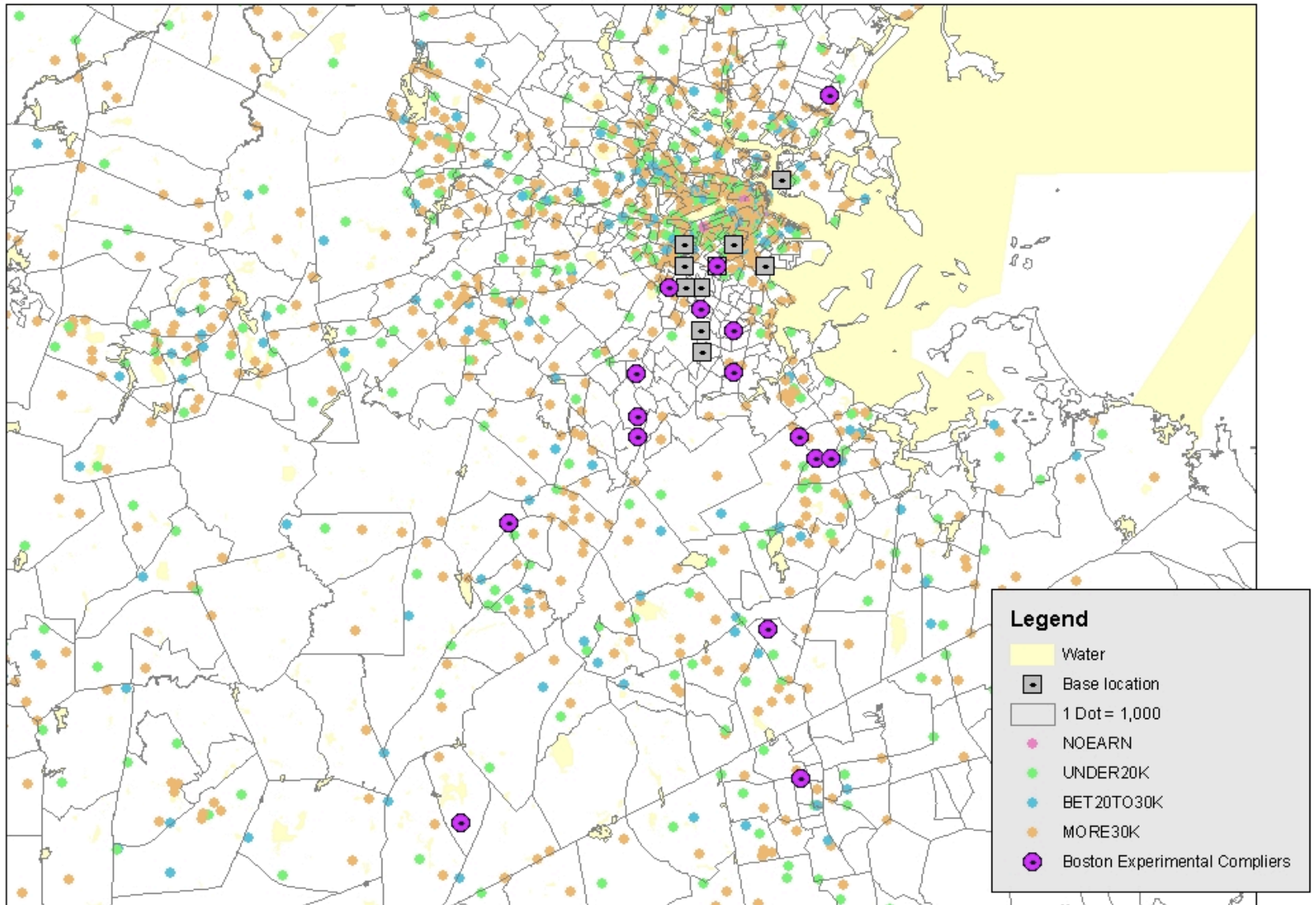
- No significant *generalized* impacts on employment, earnings or receipt of public assistance.
- *Welfare reform and strong job economy* raised employment across treatment groups.
- **Some impacts when disaggregated *by site*:**
  - Los Angeles: Increased rate of employment.
  - New York: Significant increases in earnings.
  - Women under 40 appear to do better in the job market.
- **Length of exposure to more advantaged neighborhoods is associated with employment outcomes—*though possible selection effects cloud this picture.***

# Spatial Mismatch

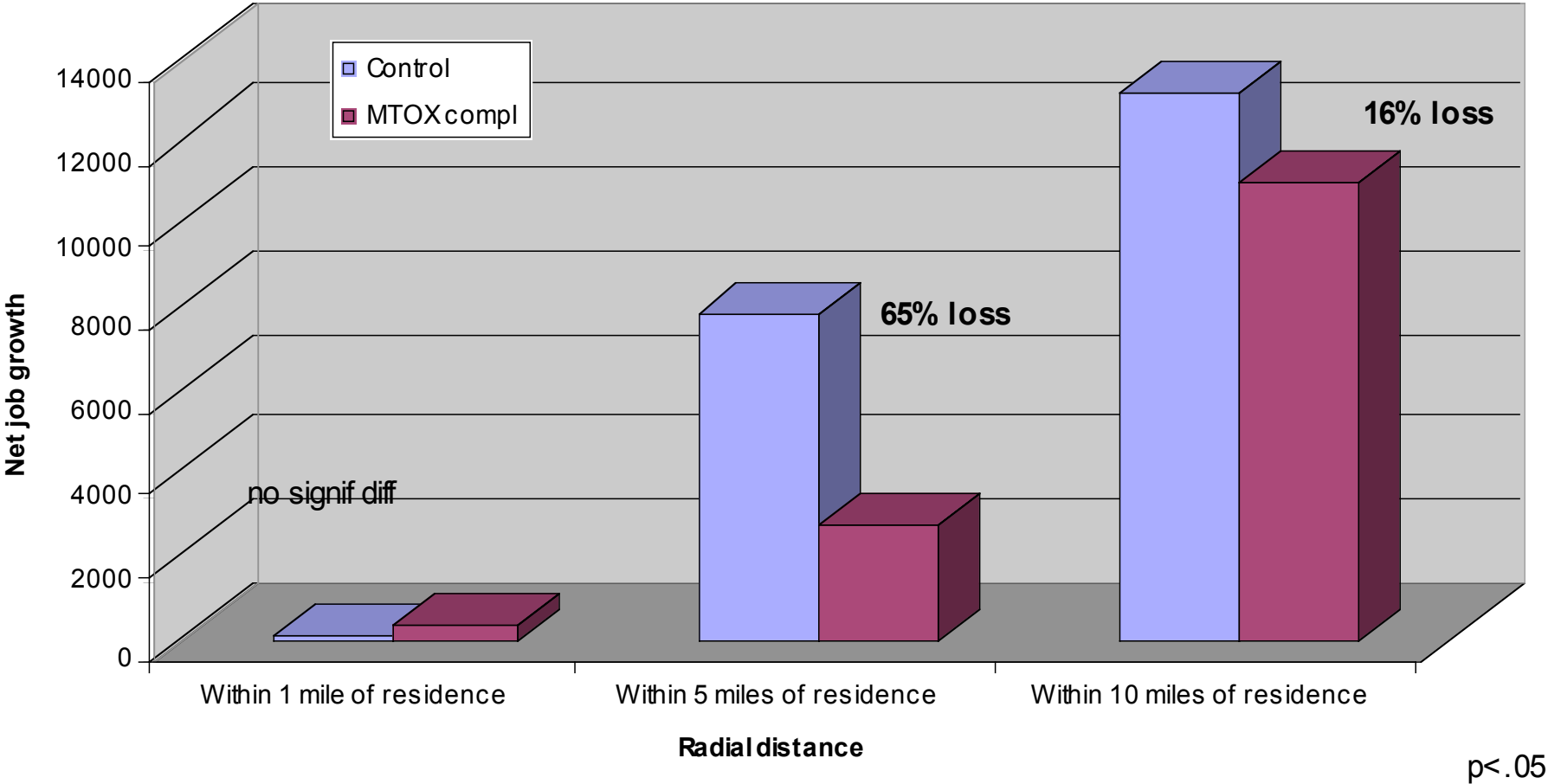
- **Boston & New York: Relocating meant leaving denser concentration of low-wage jobs in transit-rich areas for car-reliant areas in low job density communities.**
- **Compliers actually lost spatial access to entry-level job growth zones in Los Angeles (65% at 5 mile radius, 16% at 10 miles).**
- **All three sites: High concentration in healthcare, retail and social services.**
- **Some families moved closer to jobs they already had:**

**“I started while I was in Manhattan and then moved here where I was closer to work, which was a plus for me. Yeah, it’s like now 10 minutes [away] ... and I also do a lot of overtime.” (Rhadiya)**

# Boston MSA: Housing vs. job concentrations



Treatment effects on proximity to entry-level job growth:  
MTO in Los Angeles



# The real challenge

- **Lining up jobs-housing-support “matches”**
  - Accessible childcare at low or no cost was often unstable (relatives move, refuse, become risky)
  - Low-wage job market and low-rent housing markets both bruising and so much in flux for those on the bottom: rent spikes, layoffs, shift changes



# Social Networks

- **Assumptions:** Movers would be willing and able to *form* ties, and their more advantaged neighbors would be willing and able to *provide* information.
- **But movers don't "convert" new locations into significant new social resources:** Had casual, mostly cordial, interaction with neighbors, lives remained *kin-centered*, with some *distancing* from burdensome relatives.
- **They were far more likely to get referrals from current and former co-workers, few of whom were neighbors; some from kin or another trusted source, such as clergy.**



# Norms

- **In low poverty neighborhoods: Feelings of security and calm; pride in having neighbors who worked—possible “observation effects” but little interaction with adults.**
- **The next generation: gains in motivation and soft skills? Esperanza’s acculturation strains and gains:**

**[The fieldworker] asked about “ghetto style” and she explained, “leaning back, always being casual. Always have attitude when out, even in other neighborhoods.” ... She said that she doesn’t want to act like that anymore and her L.A friends make fun of her ... “If I hadn’t moved to the Valley I would have been naïve to other races. The Valley taught me how to fit in.” (Fieldnote)**

# Serious barriers to work, lack of job readiness

- **Missing skills and credentials**
- **Chronic health and mental health problems (self or dependent)**
- **Lack of transportation isolates some**

Tina came back to the conversation saying that she had decided she really didn't want to do the training because it was so far. "She has to be to school at 8, I have to catch a ferry, he takes him [Dad takes son to daycare] thank god, I don't know what I would do, then catching the bus and a ferry and the train and then the bus. It's crazy. Or two trains to Spring street on those days."

## **Assisted relocation is no panacea, but it “promotes” some women:**

**I asked Anique how she feels that she's been successful in her life. She responds, "Maintaining employment through all the layoffs and downsizing, where I didn't have to end up goin' back on welfare. Getting my daughter out of the Jordan Downs [public housing projects]. And I'm still working on everything else." (Fieldnote)**

# Conclusions and implications

- **It's the jobs-housing-support matches. *Need supports that make each leg of the stool—jobs or training, childcare, affordable rental housing—more stable and secure. “Car vouchers” could help, too.***
- **Relocation alone does little to affect the employment or employability of those who are not work ready. It cannot overcome the barriers, and it isolates some. *Need better targeting, plus intensive supports.***
- **Low-income movers don't convert new locations into significant new social resources. *Institutional connections could be fostered.***
- **Unstable footholds: Rental housing that *stayed* affordable, where landlords accepted vouchers, was not easy to find. *Supply-side strategies “hard” and “soft.”***