

DHM RESEARCH

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METRO REGIONAL TRAVEL OPTIONS

Telephone Survey and Focus Group Research Summary



Why use non-auto transportation modes?

"It's easier to get downtown. I drove the first day and the car behind me got hit by the car behind them so I started taking the MAX from Clackamas Town Center to downtown Portland."

"I started commuting sometimes when I lived in southeast but it was difficult because I had to transfer a lot to get to work. Now that we've moved to St. John's, it's just an 18 minute bus ride."

"I take it because it's better for the environment, it feels less wasteful, and I get some exercise in my commute. It's a great way to see and know the community."

Are there barriers to using non-auto transportation modes?

"Sometimes I'm at a place, and I'm like 'how do I get to this place?' And then I have to piece together 30 brochures to plan the trip. So I just drive."

"I have two kids so it gets pretty spendy. We'll get on the bus to go to Saturday Market, which they think is fun but it's more expensive than driving for me. You can park for \$5, which is cheaper than buying everyone MAX tickets."

"Paying for public transportation on top of paying for a car is hard. If I have a car and am already paying for gas, it's probably cheaper to drive than go buy a \$5 MAX ticket."



How do you plan your trips?

"Google figures out what you're trying to say when you put in an address. It's less annoying [than Trip Planner]."

"There's uncertainty with TriMet Trip Planner. Sometimes things are late and then you miss your connection."

"It must be a generational thing. I wouldn't use an app, but my kids would. But I'd like a text message."

What do you need to use non-auto modes more often?

"A free 30-day pass in a packet. I don't want to spend a bunch of money getting lost. If the cost wasn't a factor initially, I'd take it more."

"A weekend rate or family rate where kids are a lot cheaper. I'd use it all the time if they had that."

"Lower cost for a monthly pass. It's hard to get one now on top of what I'm paying for the car."

"A small tax break as an incentive to put your car away. A lot of us could use that at tax time."

"Has anyone ever seen the MAX or bus company say, 'this is the cost of your monthly driving trips with gas and insurance. This is the price of taking public transit.'?"

INTRODUCTION

Davis, Hibbitts & Midghall, Inc. (DHM Research) conducted telephone and focus group research to assess the travel patterns and awareness of travel choices among residents living in the Portland-metro region.

The telephone survey, which was the first stage of the research project, provided a baseline of residents' awareness of travel choices and travel information in the region. This baseline will provide Metro a tool by which the growth of awareness of RTO programs and outreach and other travel information sources can be measured.

Subsequent focus groups were conducted to elaborate on survey findings and qualitatively explore how drivers who occasionally use other modes interact with available information sources, including how they feel these sources could be improved, and to better understand the support and incentives people need to increase their usage of non-auto transportation modes.

This memo summarizes the key findings and takeaways from the research. The full reports can be accessed by request.¹ The research methodology is further explained in Appendix A of this memo.

SUMMARY

There is decent exposure in the region to walking as a travel mode, especially for leisure activities and shopping.

- One-third (34%) of residents walk as a form of transportation on a monthly basis, with 23% who do so weekly or more. Walking trips are primarily for shopping (75%) and leisure (72%).
- Focus group participants reported walking as a way to better explore and take part in the community, including discovering shops and restaurants, and interacting with their neighbors.

Only one in 10 residents bicycle (11%) or use public transit (12%) on a monthly basis or more; people who use these modes find them more convenient and less stressful when taking leisure trips.

- About one in 10 residents use public transit or bicycle on a monthly basis or more (12% and 11%). While these trips are also used for leisure activities (73% and 76%), one-third of residents using these modes do so for some of their work trips.
- Focus group participants reported that they use public transit and biking for pleasure trips because they can reduce stress by avoiding traffic and parking hassles, and because it is an opportunity for them to explore the community.

There is high awareness of TriMet Trip Planner, in large part because of its online presence. By comparison, RTO programs surveyed had low to moderate awareness.

- The telephone survey results showed that six in 10 residents (59%) have heard of TriMet Trip Planner, and 43% have used it. All focus group participants had heard of TriMet Trip Planner, and most have used it to plan their trips. They were also aware of Transit Tracker.
- The telephone survey also found that users are highly satisfied with TriMet Trip Planner (94% satisfied), and many feel it helps them plan their trips better and make fewer single-person car trips. Three in 10 (29%) telephone survey respondents also said it resulted in them riding transit more frequently.

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- Focus group participants, especially participants under 40, were relatively satisfied with TriMet Trip Planner, although they felt it could be improved by using real-time information, and having an interface similar to Google Maps, which they expressed is better at predicting addresses and displays information more clearly.
- Slightly more than three in 10 (34%) respondents from the telephone survey are aware of Drive Less/Save More; approximately one-third indicated there is a presence of travel options information at their workplace. Fewer than two in 10 are aware of the other RTO programs.
- There were several participants in the focus groups who had possibly participated in bicycle-related RTO programs, although they could not name the specific program. They had, however, received bike maps and found them helpful in planning their bicycle trips. Other participants were interested in the maps after hearing more about them.

Travel information is critical for those who want to bicycle or take transit more often, especially real time and on-the-go information.

- While residents are highly aware of TriMet Trip Planner, more frequent public transit users from the focus groups said it is necessary to use multiple information sources to plan their trip, including TriMet Trip Planner, Google Maps, 239-RIDE, and Transit Tracker.
- Focus group participants stated that information should be found in both physical and virtual spaces, especially real-time, up to date information that they can access on the go. These include maps, electronic boards, Smart Phone Apps, text messages, and Transit Tracker.
- Both telephone survey and focus group respondents were less aware of information sources for planning bicycle trips. Those who were aware of bicycling maps said they are helpful in teaching them how to travel safely and efficiently using these modes, specifically mentioning showing them roads with “greenways” or dedicated bike lanes.

Top barriers to using public transit include the idea that vehicles are necessary and that transit is inconvenient and too costly.

- The focus groups allowed for further exploration of barriers to using public transit. Some barriers users come across when deciding to commute by public transit is that it is too time consuming, it causes them stress because of the timeliness and frequency of services, and there is a lack of convenient transit stops near their homes or destinations.
- Cost of public transit is a real issue for participants, especially those with children or in a partnership. Public transit is perceived as more expensive than driving if they are paying for more than one person, and that it is an added travel cost for those who are paying a car payment, car insurance, and gas.

Increasing ridership of public transit, especially for recruiting, is a layered issue. Focus group participants asked for:

- **More public transit infrastructure** – more transfer options and ways to increase security and their perception of safety at transit stops, like phones or security guards.
- **More information in more places** – maps and reader boards at transit stops, real-time information through TriMet Trip Planner and a Smart Phone application, texting, and a person to talk to who can help plan a trip.
- **Positive advertising** – in the community, show them advertising that relates to the positive side of public transit: saving money, convenience for pleasure trips, less stressful, better for the environment, being able to see the community, and spending time with family.
- **Cost reductions** – reduced ticket and monthly pass prices, family discounts, unlimited transfers after 7pm, “buy 10, get 1 free,” weekend rates, tax breaks, discounts on insurance. Participants named a number of cost-related items that would encourage them take more trips on public transit, but for them the bottom line was that they need something that lowers their direct cost of using the system.

OBSERVATIONS

Talk about the convenience of using public transit, walking, or biking when doing entertainment activities. The focus group population mostly uses transit for their pleasure trips because the modes are convenient to them – they avoid traffic and the hassle of looking for parking, which in turn reduces stress. For some participants, transit is also a way for them to be responsible when going to happy hours or similar activities, and it is less expensive than a taxi. These things are key motivators to users when deciding if using public transit is their preferred mode for certain types of trips.

Give users and potential users context on how using public transit is, or could be, a cost saving measure for them and their families. Participants are motivated to use public transit for a variety of reasons, but a large motivator for them to use their personal vehicles less frequently is how it could translate into cost savings. They are unsure if taking public transit is a cost saving measure or more expensive for them when they are with their families. There is also a lack of information about their options to make the system more affordable to them.

Show them support for using public transit through real-time and on-the-go information in both virtual and physical places. Focus group participants want real-time arrival information available to them online, through their SmartPhones, by calling Transit Tracker, and on reader boards at the stops.

Spread the word about the support available to them for planning safe biking and walking trips through biking and walking specific maps. Like public transit, participants want these maps available online, through mobile devices, and in an easy to transport physical form. The maps should continue to be color-coded, show them how to avoid high-traffic areas, and they should also give them an idea of how long their bike trips would take. These maps are an important education and safety tool for bicyclists and potential bicyclists.

Make information interfaces user-friendly. The convenience of using information is important to users, meaning that it has real-time updates, understands addresses easily, and is available to them online and through a mobile application. Participants like Google Maps – both online and through their mobile devices – because it “understands” what they are trying to say, and the interface is clear and user-friendly.

Let them know their options. If they miss a bus or MAX, do they have an alternative route available to them? Like other information, participants want this information accessible online and through their mobile devices. They also want to see more maps at transit stops. These maps should be able to show them if they can take multiple buses to their destination.

APPENDIX A

Research Methodologies

Telephone Survey Research Methodology: A telephone survey was conducted between October 24 and November 5, 2010 of residents age 16 and older living in the Portland-metro region. The survey lasted an average of 12 minutes to administer. The sample make up was:

- N=250 general population, with quotas set by age, gender, and county based on the total population to ensure a representative sample
- N=358 alternate mode users, defined as residents who walk, bicycle, or use public transit daily, weekly, or monthly

Respondents were contacted by random digit dialing (RDD) and wireless (cell phone) sample. In gathering responses, a variety of quality control measures were employed, including questionnaire pre-testing and validations.

Statement of Limitations: Any sampling of opinions or attitudes is subject to a margin of error, which represents the difference between a sample of a given population and the total population (here, residents in the Portland-metro area). The margin of error for the general population (N=250) sample was +/-6.0% at the 95% confidence level. The margin of error for the alternate mode users sample was +/-5.1% at the 95% confidence level.²

Focus Group Research Methodology: Two focus groups were conducted on Saturday, April 30, 2011. The groups were segmented by age, with the first group comprising of residents ages 18 to 39 and the second group comprising of residents ages 40 to 54. A total of 14 people participated in the discussion, eight in the first group and six in the second group.

There was representation from Clark, Clackamas, Multnomah, and Washington counties in each group, with an even distribution of gender and residents living in urban and suburban areas. One-half of the participants in each group live outside of Multnomah County.

Aside from age and location, participants were selected by the following criteria:

- Use public transit between one and three times a week
- Bike or walk as a form of transportation at least once a month, but not weekly
- Employed at least 20 hours a week or full-time student
- Expressed at least some interest in using public transit, walking, or biking as transportation forms
- Did not work for a transportation agency

The focus groups were each led by a professional moderator and consisted of both written exercises and group discussions. Each group was 120 minutes in length and was recorded by an operator controlled video operator.

Statement of Limitations: Although research of this type is not designed to measure, with statistical reliability, the attitudes of a particular group, it is valuable because it gives a sense of the attitudes and opinions of the population from which the sample was drawn.

DHM Research has been providing opinion research and consultation throughout the Pacific Northwest for over three decades. The firm is non-partisan and independent, and specializes in research projects to support public policy-making. www.dhmresearch.com

² These plus-minus error margins represent differences between the sample and total population at a confidence interval, or probability, calculated to be 95%. This means that there is a 95% probability that the sample taken for this study would fall within the stated margins of error if compared with the results achieved from surveying the entire population.