

Ventura County Short Range Transit Plan 2025-2034

Engagement and Outreach Summary



Prepared for:

Ventura County Transportation Commission

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Table of Contents

Engagement and Outreach Summary	1
Summary of Outreach	3
Phase 1: Initiation and Identification of Needs	5
Phase 2: General Public and Non-Riders Online Survey Results	11
Phase 3 Engagement Summary	40
Engagement Outcomes	42

SUMMARY OF OUTREACH

The Ventura County Short Range Transit Plan (S RTP) conducted community engagement at several stages throughout the project to better understand the issues and needs that people face in using transit across Ventura County. Engagement also sought to gauge reactions to initial concepts for the Plan. This report summarizes the activities and outcomes in engaging the public and key stakeholders. The table below provides an overview of the engagement phases and activities conducted.

The public input and community engagement approach consisted of three phases. Phase 1 began with the goal of identifying specific transit needs, in order to set the direction for the S RTP, to guide the data analysis, as well as to refine targets and topics for additional surveys later on. Phase 2 defined the needs and opportunities to pursue in developing transit improvements. Using input and results from Phases 1 and 2, the consultant team developed initial service concepts, and brought those draft concepts back to the public. Phase 3 gathered feedback on these initial concepts, to help influence the final Plan.

This report provides the greatest detail about the outcomes of Phases 1 and 2. Phase 3 is addressed at a higher level here, but is discussed more thoroughly in the eventual S RTP document alongside the final recommendations specifically shaped by Phase 3 public input outcomes.

Project Stage	Audience	When	Activities
Phase 1 – Initiation, Identification of Needs	Agency staff and Committees: CTAC, SSTAC, HVTAC, HVPAC, staff	December 2023-January 2024	TRANSCOM regular meeting introduction to S RTP process and initial priorities. Workshop session with transportation-related committees
	General public	January 2024	Combined Unmet Needs/S RTP public listening sessions in Thousand Oaks, Camarillo, Moorpark, Simi Valley, Oxnard, Ojai, and Fillmore
	Partner stakeholders	January 2024	Stakeholder focus groups with social services agencies, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), education institutions and employers, and healthcare programs
	Everyone	January 2024	Project website launch and updated periodically

Project Stage	Audience	When	Activities
Phase 2 – Surveying Riders and Non-Riders	Fixed-route transit riders	February-April 2024	On-board surveys distributed to riders across VCTC, Thousand Oaks, Simi Valley, Camarillo, Moorpark, and Valley Express routes
	General public	Spring 2024	Online survey promoted through e-blast, social media. Approximately 450 out of about 600 responses were from Ventura County residents.
	Demand-response riders	Summer 2024	Mailed/online surveys distributed countywide to dial-a-ride/paratransit riders
Phase 3 – Input on Service Plan Recommendations	Agency staff	September 2024 -May 2025	TRANSCOM regular meetings, individual community working meetings
	General public	December 2024	In-person and virtual workshops presenting draft service concepts
	Committees: CTAC, SSTAC, HVTAC, HVPAC, staff	November 2024 – February 2025	Updates to committees, staff, and elected leaders on conceptual recommendations

Phase 1: Initiation and Identification of Needs

The first phase of engagement introduced the project objectives to both the general public and direct stakeholders, and sought input on the specific transportation needs that the SRTP should consider. The activities in this phase involved questions about the mobility challenges people in Ventura face, and what features a transit network would require to reduce barriers to accessing jobs, services, schools, or other needs.

The top issues that came up most frequently and across multiple audiences include:

1. **Awareness of transit options is a significant barrier to increasing ridership.** The engagement team received feedback about the general public's unfamiliarity with what services are available to whom, and how easy or difficult it may be for different segments of the public to interpret or trust the information that is available. Core market segments such as college students, seniors, people whose first language is not English, and people with disabilities engage with transit differently, engage with media differently, and would benefit from more directly relevant marketing and promotion.
2. **Span of service and low bus route frequency significantly limit interest and ability for potential riders to use transit.** Infrequent service may result in long travel times for destinations beyond someone's local community. People are often unable to use transit to attend social and cultural events or travel to jobs outside traditional daytime hours, because transit service on at least one leg of the trip ends too early or connections might be missed.
3. **College students and seniors** are at different stages in their life, but often have similar motivations to use transit. These include transit's affordability, disinterest or inability to drive (which may include lack of access to a car), and need to access services, jobs and entertainment/cultural activities. In Ventura County, students and seniors generally live in communities farther from urban centers, where transit service may be less frequent or have limited coverage, leading to longer travel times.
4. **Reaching key Ventura County destinations is (or is perceived to be) difficult and time-consuming.** This is a function of the issues discussed above: public awareness, ability to plan a trip across multiple providers, and the reality that service levels and schedules vary widely and are not coordinated between providers.
5. **Stakeholders and riders identified many desired programmatic recommendations to attract more riders to transit.** Beyond improving availability and coordination of service, improvements to travel training, marketing and promotions, online information, engagement with leadership at organizations and schools, and other improvements will promote the current services and boost ridership.

Phase 1 was successful in engaging and receiving feedback from stakeholder groups, agency staff, and transportation-related committees, and much of the input summarized above was generated by participants from these groups. Unfortunately, Phase 1 was less successful in engaging the general public, including current riders. Seven community workshops held across the county comprised the

primary activities for soliciting input from the general public. Despite the concerted efforts of the consultant team and VCTC staff, these workshops were very sparsely attended.

The following pages categorize the input that emerged from the Phase 1 engagement by themes. The columns to the right show which stakeholder audience raised the issue. **The quantity of marks across audiences is not intended to indicate any level of importance or priority.**

Input	Agency Staff	CTAC/ SSTAC	Stakeholders	Riders	General Public
Communication and promotion					
Awareness of service availability is poor among the general public.		●	●		●
Material online may not be “senior-friendly.” Reliance on the internet may also underserve Spanish-speaking population.		●	●		
Online search functions like Google Maps do not always accurately reflect current service.			●		
Online information should be integrated into one site; riders aren’t concerned about who operates the service, but how to get to their destination.			●		
Travel training is a useful tool and should be extended to key staff at partner agencies like Behavioral Health Services and schools.		●	●	●	
Fare program awareness may be limited; vendors should be prepared to inform riders about the ability to reload online. Initial rollout of the countywide fare media was bumpy.	●			●	
Agencies have limited investment in marketing and promotion while facing shortage of staff and bus operators.	●				
Perception of safety among general public does not reflect actual, positive experience of riders and should be addressed with better communication.			●		
Fixed-Route Network					
Limited route frequency makes it hard to travel between communities.		●	●	●	●
Long travel times are also a significant barrier to using transit.		●	●	●	
Difficulty in planning transit trips (due to lack of coordination between multiple providers).			●	●	
Travel to regional centers – Camarillo, Ventura, and Oxnard – is difficult from most other communities, and involves disproportionately long travel times.		●	●	●	
Focusing improvement on local service will help intercity utility by reducing transfer times between routes.	●			●	
Current route design, service span, and intercity connections may not match post-pandemic travel patterns.	●			●	

Input	Agency Staff	CTAC/ SSTAC	Stakeholders	Riders	General Public
Environmental concerns are not enough to motivate people to use transit; making a more functional service is essential.		●			
Staff are curious about how microtransit is changing opportunity for transit.	●				
On-time performance and reliability are areas for improvement, as is communicating these outcomes to the public.		●			
Bus stop lighting and other infrastructure investments are needed to improve safety.			●	●	
<i>Unserved, underserved, and future destinations</i>					
Currently difficult to use transit to get to Los Angeles County.		●		●	
Bus service coordination with Metrolink could be improved.	●			●	
Requests for service to Kaiser Woodland Hills, but Thousand Oaks past pilot did not generate substantial ridership.		●			
Students have significant travel needs including access to groceries, career support programs, and jobs.			●		
Better access to community cultural events is a need cited by both students and seniors who have more flexibility in their schedule, but transit service typically is not operating late enough to serve these trips.		●	●	●	●
Transit could improve access to low-income housing (existing and planned). Examples include around Moorpark City Hall, Thousand Oaks downtown revitalization, Simi Valley new housing distributed, Santa Paula East Area 1 and 2 (hospital relocation), and Lewis Road developments near Somis.	●	●			
Future developments near transit may have less on-site parking with the intent to support transit use, but it does not necessarily follow that the nearby transit actually serves the development's needs.			●		
County is building senior housing near CSUCI; transit-supportive land use, but otherwise "in the middle of nowhere."	●				
Transit should support farm workers.			●		
Some residents and isolated communities face food insecurity and need better access to grocery stores, including Ojai, Oak View, Casitas Springs, Cal Lutheran and CSUCI students, and Saticoy residents.			●		
Local agency staff typically hear very little request for intercity or cross-jurisdiction transit.	●				
Camarillo: City receives many requests to expand fixed-route service and staff hope this will control DAR costs. Camarillo is difficult to get around by transit when VCTC services aren't running.	●		●	●	
Fillmore / Piru: No specific input received in this phase					

Input	Agency Staff	CTAC/ SSTAC	Stakeholders	Riders	General Public
Moorpark: <i>No specific input received in this phase</i>					
Oak Park: <i>No specific input received in this phase</i>					
Ojai Valley: Need for better access to County services, especially specialty care in Ventura, Oxnard and Camarillo.			●		
Oxnard / Port Hueneme: Ventura County Behavioral Health (Oxnard) is difficult to reach on transit. The Collection is another key destination.		●		●	
Simi Valley: Some underserved areas to the north and south, Madera and Wood Ranch areas. Service is less frequent than desired. City seeks to expand service coverage using microtransit.	●		●	●	
Santa Paula: Service design does not support residents in the north end and along Ojai Road.			●	●	
Thousand Oaks: Cal Lutheran may be underserved. Major employment centers in Thousand Oaks Newbury Park area.			●		
Ventura: VA Clinic is a key destination and a direct shuttle from the Thousand Oaks Goebel Adult Community Center is desired.			●		
<i>Demand-Response and NEMT Service</i>					
Non-emergency medical trips (NEMT) service needed between rural areas and hospitals or specialists. Residents in east end of County often receive medical referrals/providers in Simi Valley, Oxnard, Ventura and need to get across the County for medical trips. Potential users may be unaware of their options through GO Access and ECTA for travel beyond their community.		●			
People don't know what health insurance transportation benefits exist.		●	●		
Many Gold Coast Health Plan members must travel for medical services, and many have young children. The existing benefit covering health care transportation can require reservation a month in advance.		●			
Transfers between dial-a-ride services can substantially increase travel time.		●			
If reaching other communities were easier (better or no transfers), demand might grow but majority of rider trips are within the home community.		●			
Call center staffing shortages were translating into long call wait times and reduced efficiency.	●				
Costs began to jump up substantially as staffing levels and more capacity for DAR service were restored.	●				

Input	Agency Staff	CTAC/ SSTAC	Stakeholders	Riders	General Public
Seniors reporting to staff that ECTA fares for intercity DAR trips are high.	●				
GO Access providing direct service to Camarillo has helped minimize costs. However, requests for direct service beyond that is extremely limited.	●				
Staffing					
Operator training improvements needed for serving people using wheelchairs.		●			
Some agencies still struggling with restoring full staffing levels.	●				
Several agencies were anticipating new technology like RideCo to improve efficiency.	●				
Post-Pandemic trip changes					
Gold Coast ridership is increasing in afternoons and early evenings. Most increases are from students and essential workers, thanks in part to the Youth Ride Free program and restoration of pre-pandemic service levels.	●				
Valley Express ridership on Piru Route has returned to pre-pandemic levels as students have returned.	●				
Intercity ridership has been slow to recover. This is likely due to commute-focused services while many jobs are now partly or fully remote. Metrolink faces similar challenges.	●				
Increasing utilization of private transportation providers (Ventura Transit Services, Help of Ojai) and similar challenges with staff and volunteer capacity.		●			
Gold Coast staff observe less travel to local colleges.	●				
DAR ridership has not fully recovered because past programs like Adult Day Healthcare have reduced their scope.	●				
Policy					
Policies should focus on opportunities to expand access and avoid competing for ridership.	●				
Leverage resources to do more rather than identify new investments.	●				
Cost comparisons between agency operations should be apples-to-apples.	●				
Desire to continue free student fares.	●				
Improving multimodal corridors, especially making biking to transit easier through better bike lanes and storage at transit hubs will improve access.			●	●	

Input	Agency Staff	CTAC/ SSTAC	Stakeholders	Riders	General Public
Alignment on demand-response trip reservation policy and capacity is desired. Can be difficult for riders in some communities to guarantee a trip without several days advance reservation due to constrained capacity.		●		●	
Forcing uniform policy across will negatively affect some communities for other's benefits. For example, requiring weekend service that isn't supported by funding or ridership, or conversely reducing one community's weekend service to expand other services.	●				

Phase 2: General Public and Non-Riders Online Survey Results

The SRTP team conducted several surveys, the first of which was an online survey aimed broadly at anyone who might have a transportation interest in Ventura County. It was designed to capture input from both transit riders and non-riders to help guide the SRTP analysis that followed. Stakeholder agencies and project partners promoted the survey, which was hosted on the project website. The survey was translated into Spanish and Mandarin Chinese, and before publication was reviewed by members of the project team who are native speakers of these languages.

About 600 legitimate responses were received; unfortunately, the survey was disrupted by malicious “bot” activity which generated several thousand additional responses. These responses appear to be illegitimate entries attempting to take advantage of the chance to win a gift card reward. Of the apparently legitimate responses, about half included current or recent past riders.

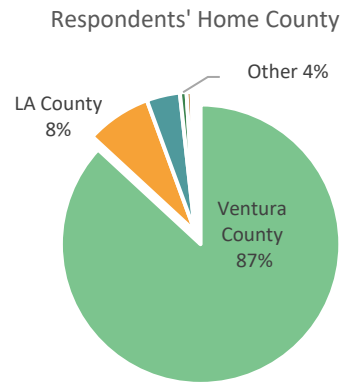


As a group, it is typically difficult to solicit meaningful input on transit from non-riders. They are generally under-informed about the availability of service, and may only think of transit in the abstract. Because of this, the survey design focused on evaluating the respondent’s awareness of the various transit offerings in the County and quantifying what factors most affect their disinterest in using transit.

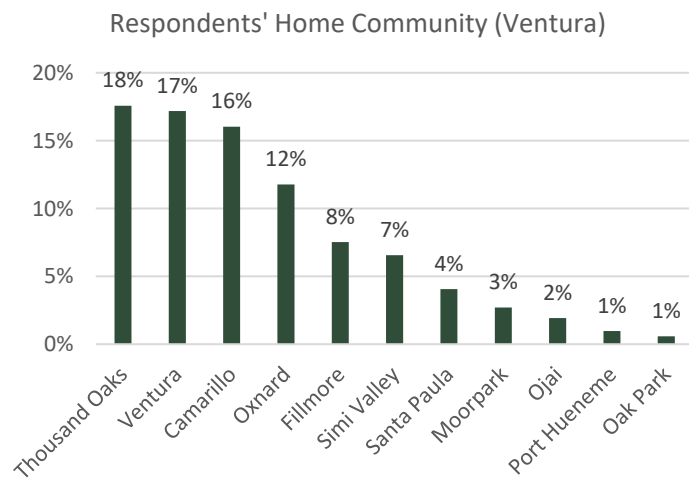
This section begins by reviewing the demographics of all respondents and then focuses on the responses of non-riders. The following section delves further into the transit rider responses and incorporates the results of the surveys distributed on-board the buses around the same period.

ONLINE SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS, ALL RESPONDENTS

The vast majority of respondents were from Ventura County. Despite the Coastal Express and Surfliner connections, very few respondents were from Santa Barbara.

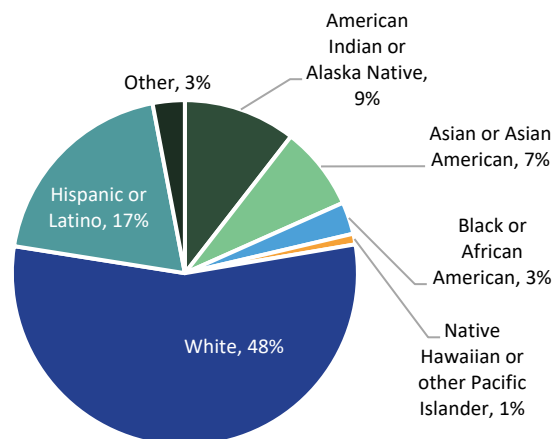


The distribution of respondents did not closely match the distribution of community populations within the County, but generally reflects community size. The exception to this was Simi Valley which was underrepresented compared to its proportion of the county population. Responses were captured from every community.



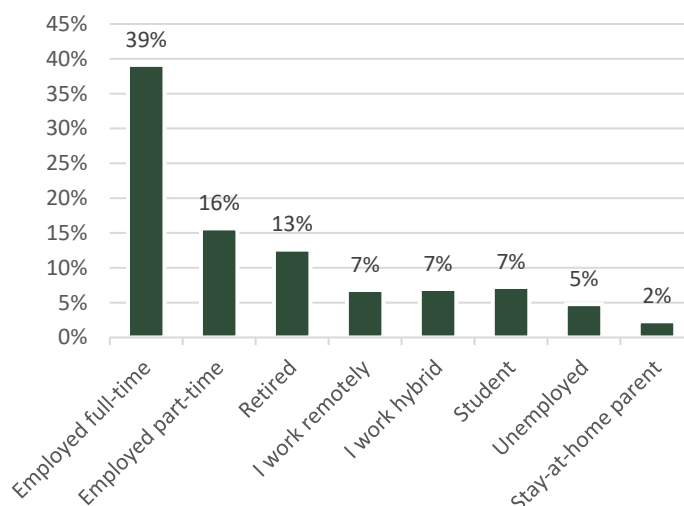
Survey respondents were generally reflective of Ventura County's demographics. The Census asks about Hispanic heritage independently of race, so it is difficult to compare directly, but the survey responses from Hispanic and Latino residents may under-represent the County population.

Race and Ethnicity



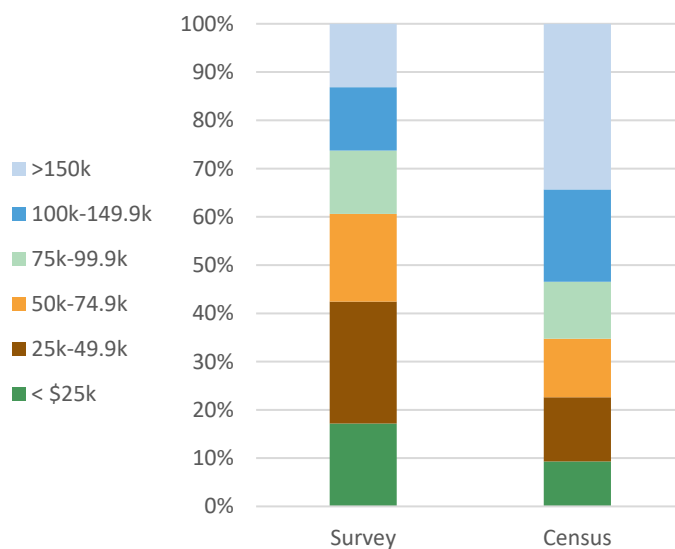
Over 45% of respondents were employed at least part-time. Notably, about 14% of respondents stated they work remotely at least part of the time, which is a key issue stakeholders raised affecting ridership. Respondents could check all that apply, so the 14% who work remotely at least part of the time are a subset of those who are employed at least part-time. Students were under-represented in the overall survey results relative to the proportion of ridership they are believed to comprise.

What best describes your circumstances over the past year?



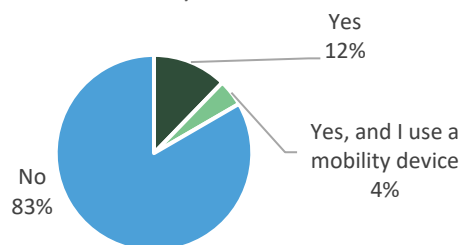
Survey respondents were disproportionately low-income compared to the Census-described County distribution, but respondents were captured across the income range.

What is your household income?



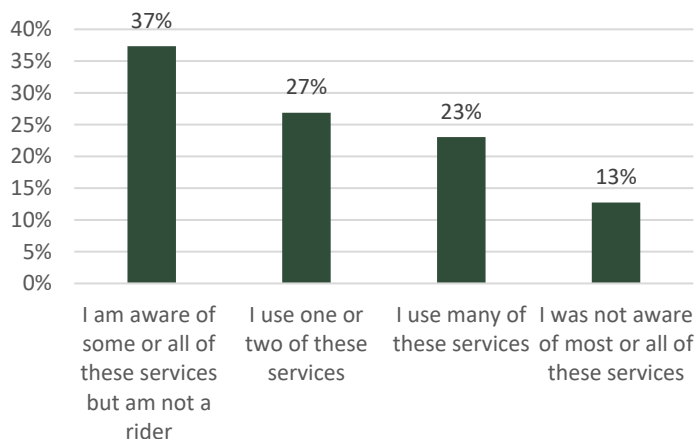
Respondents were marginally more likely to have a disability than the approximately 12% estimated by the 2020 Census for the County population.

Do you have a disability that impacts your mobility?



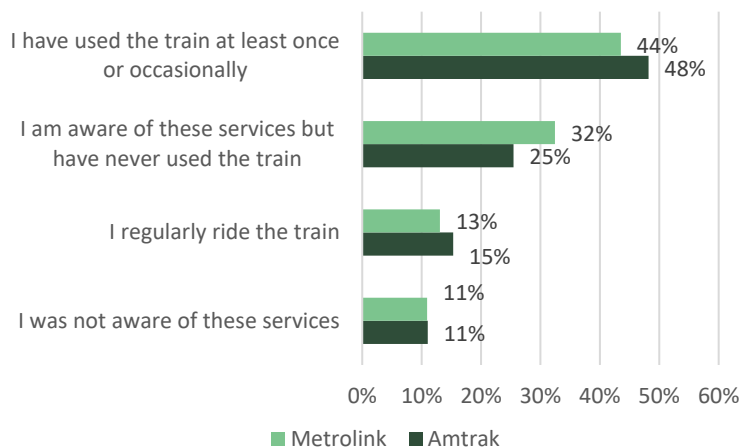
When asked broadly about bus service in Ventura County, 13% responded that they were unaware of most or all services, and 37% had some awareness but did not consider themselves riders. These numbers combined mean about half of survey respondents should be considered “non-riders.”

How familiar are you with Ventura County public transit bus services?



Awareness of the regional rail operations was substantially higher with only 11% claiming no awareness at all, and at least 25% being aware but never having used either Metrolink or the Surfliner. About 57% or more of respondents have used the train at least occasionally.

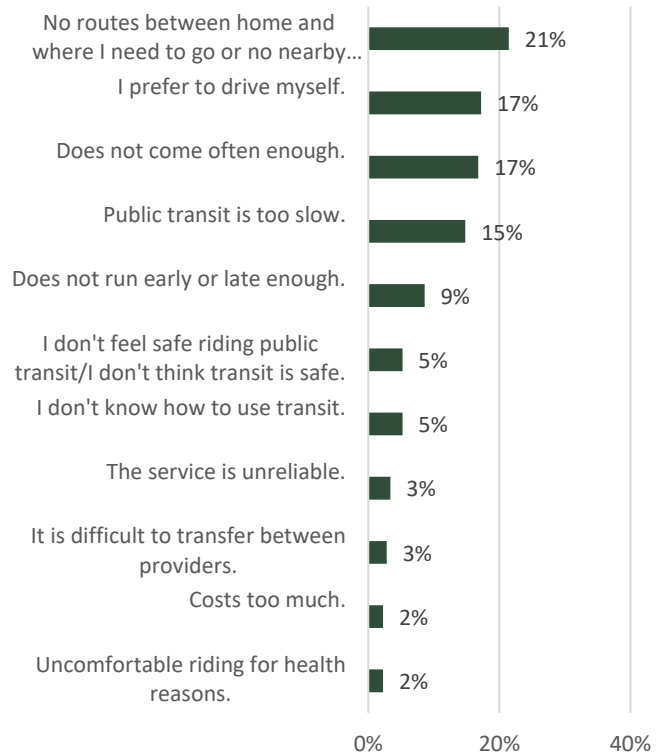
How familiar are you with rail services in Ventura County?



Respondents cited several reasons for not riding transit, with the most common being the perception that no service near them serves their needs, a preference for driving, and that transit is too slow or too infrequent. Several left comments that were supportive of public transit but simply stated they did not “need” to use transit because they have a car.

Notably, very few cited discomfort related to health which otherwise might have suggested hesitation to use transit following the pandemic. Only about 1% of respondents noted that they used to ride transit, but don’t anymore.

What top 3 reasons best describe why you don't ride transit often or at all?



WHY NON-RIDERS DON'T USE TRANSIT

The survey included open-ended responses in which non-riders expanded upon why they don't use transit in Ventura County. Some notable quotes from respondents included:¹

"Seems like too much work to figure out when I can easily drive myself. But---if there was a simple system that could show me all of these options at a glance, I might consider it."

"Transferring is essentially impossible because the frequencies are so low. If your bus comes once every hour or more and the train even less frequently it is impossible to use multiple services."

"Parking is ubiquitous and free in Ventura County which doesn't incentivize taking ... transit."

"Would love to be able to take the train into LA for evening activities such as concerts, sporting events, etc. but the last service back to Ventura County is way too early which forces us to drive."

"Too infrequent. Not aligned with big events"

"As a full-time working parent of two, it's difficult to plan your day around transit schedules relative to all of the places we need to be for our family's schedule. It's too hard to make all of the timing work out with less frequency of transit service."

"The 8:00 bus outside my apartment got cut, so now I get to work too early or too late."

Although stakeholders in focus groups and interviews were highly concerned about the perception of safety or lack of understanding for how to use transit, each of these were cited by only five percent of survey respondents. Regardless, the specific safety-related experiences that discourage people from riding the bus are crucial to address directly, monitor, and message to the public. This is closely linked with awareness and understanding of how to use the system.

"A coworker described some experiences she had on the bus system in Ventura and I was frightened. Unwanted attention by other riders."

"I don't feel safe parking and leaving my car at the train station, especially if I'm getting home late, and it's not convenient to take public transit from my home to the train station."

"I don't have any information about transit, have never heard of friends using it, so I couldn't say whether it is on time, offered often, how much it costs, whether it's safe, or anything else."

"Fear of speaking a foreign language in a transportation context."

"I actually WANT to use public transit, it's just really daunting for me, and it feels like it's really inconsistent. I think the biggest thing is just the education aspect for me. If I knew what was available and how to access it, maybe it would change."

¹ Minor edits to comments were made for clarity, spelling, and grammar.

“Wish I had a Buddy to help me the first time.”

Cost, reliability, and transferring between providers were also not top concerns for many respondents, but some respondents provided comments that were specific to the challenges people with limited mobility experience:

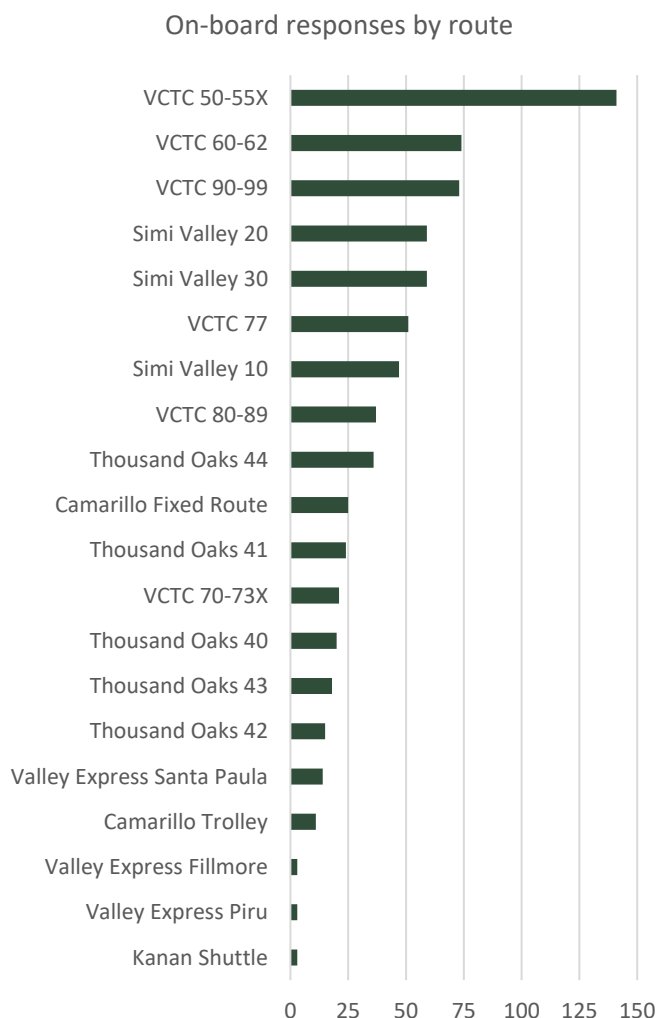
“I would like to use transit but a medical condition requires a door-to-door ride not a curb-to-curb ride. I do not qualify for no or low-cost door to door rides.”

“I have medical appointments outside of Camarillo but public transportation is too costly.”

RIDERS: ONLINE AND ON-BOARD SURVEY RESULTS

The online general public survey received approximately 50% of its responses from people who currently ride transit in Ventura County at least sometimes.² Those in this category responded to questions about their experience with the services, specifically addressing safety and comfort, as well as fare products, which were identified as potentially crucial topics for current riders.

Additionally, an on-board rider survey was distributed around the same period which asked about similar topics, plus additional questions about personal travel patterns and service quality. The on-board rider survey gathered 753 responses across routes representing Camarillo Area Transit, Kanan Shuttle, Simi Valley Transit, Thousand Oaks Transit, Valley Express, and VCTC Intercity. Surveys were also distributed on Moorpark City Transit routes, but no responses were received. Gold Coast Transit was excluded because the agency conducted its own SRTP around the same time. Surveys were made available in English, Spanish and Chinese with translations by native speakers on the consultant team. About 14.5% of on-board surveys were completed in Spanish. Only a few Chinese language surveys were returned. The distribution of responses by route is shown at right, and does not closely correspond to ridership distribution, although most routes had at least some responses.

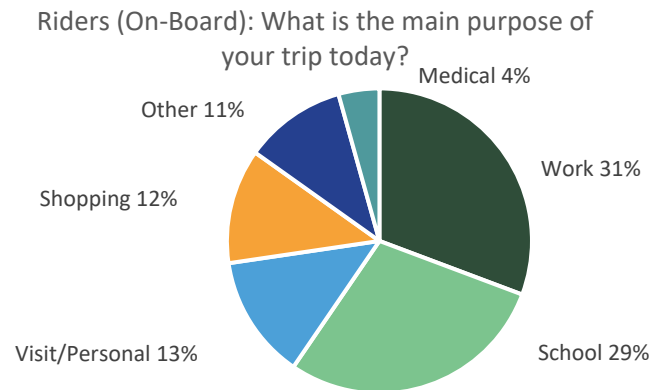


This section highlights the responses across both the online and on-board surveys that directly affect current riders and are relevant for attracting future riders.

² Respondents who selected “I regularly use transit (daily or weekly)” or “I occasionally use transit (at least once a month).”

RIDER DESTINATIONS AND ACCESS TO TRANSIT

Bus riders are using transit primarily for school and work trips: 31% of all trips are work-related, and 29% are school-related. However, this result may also reflect the skew of responses from Intercity routes, which are more likely to serve work trips than local bus routes.



Area colleges, shopping centers, and Metrolink stations account for the largest number of origins and destinations for bus passengers, although origins and destinations are very spread out across the County.

Note that these numbers represent survey responses, not actual boardings. Area colleges are a significant source of ridership in Ventura County.

Top Boarding and Alighting Locations of Survey Respondents

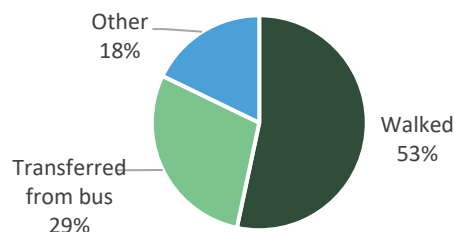
Location	Boardings
Moorpark College	16
CSUCI	15
Ventura College	13
Camarillo Metrolink	8
The Oaks	7
Location	Alightings
CSUCI	50
Camarillo Metrolink	25
The Oaks	21
Moorpark College	17
Esplanade Mall	11
Pacific View Mall	10
Ventura College	10

Approximately half of all riders get to or from the bus by walking, and 29% transfer from or to another bus.

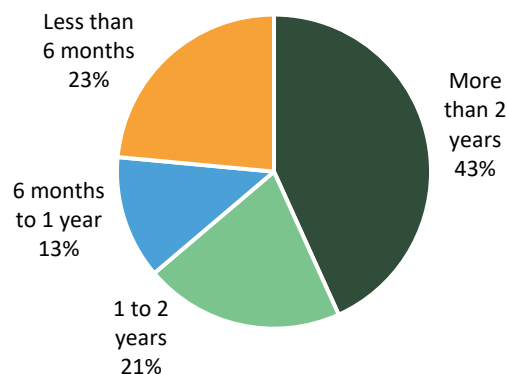
Most respondents have used the bus for at least one year, but 23% began using the system in the past six months. This suggests substantial ridership turnover, and is critically important to consider as total ridership across the county has declined over the last ten years. Ensuring new riders have a reliably high-quality experience is essential to retaining riders long-term. Many general public (online) survey respondents also noted that they were former riders who have since purchased a car, which is perhaps also indicated by only 43% of on-board respondents having been riders for longer than two years. Increasing car ownership has been cited by the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA)³ as a significant variable explaining transit ridership decline.

Transit ridership is predominantly composed of regular customers. As noted, a significant portion of riders are relatively new to the system. When examining the relationship between whether riders were new to the system and their frequency of use, those who began riding in the last 6 months were slightly more likely to respond, “Less than 1 day per week.” Regardless of how long riders have been in the system, the vast majority use transit four or more days a week.

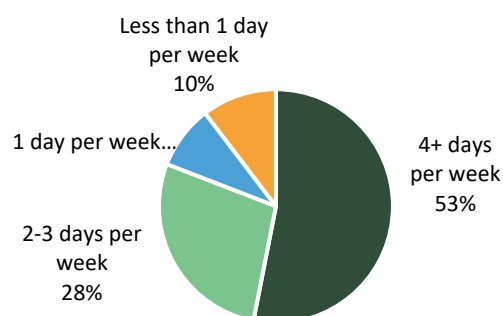
Riders (On-Board): Mode of Access to the Bus



Riders (On-Board): How long have you been riding the bus?



Riders (On-Board): How often do you ride the bus?



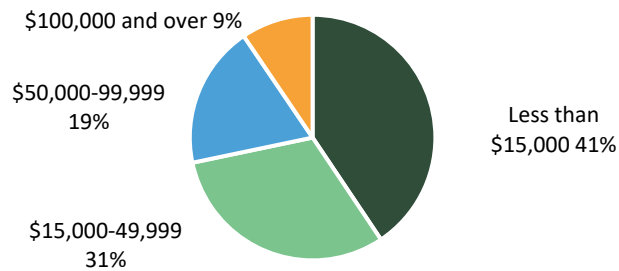
³ Manville, Taylor and Blumenberg. *Falling Transit Ridership: California and Southern California*. UCLA Lewis Center. January, 2018 <https://www.lewis.ucla.edu/research/falling-transit-ridership-california-and-southern-california/>

RIDER INCOMES AND RELATIONSHIP TO FARES

Most riders report low incomes, but over one-quarter of riders have household incomes above \$50,000. According to the on-board survey respondents, 41% live in a household with no vehicle, which is a much higher proportion than the county demographics.

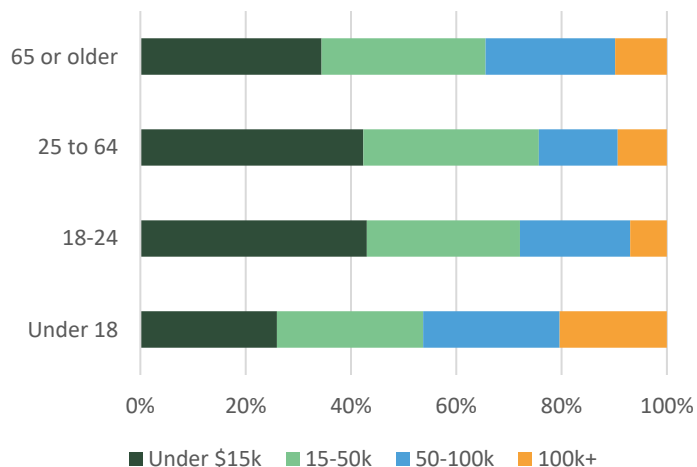
Based on the on-board surveys, transit riders skew towards much lower household income than the overall county demographics, as well as compared to the online survey responses.

Rider (On-Board) Household Income



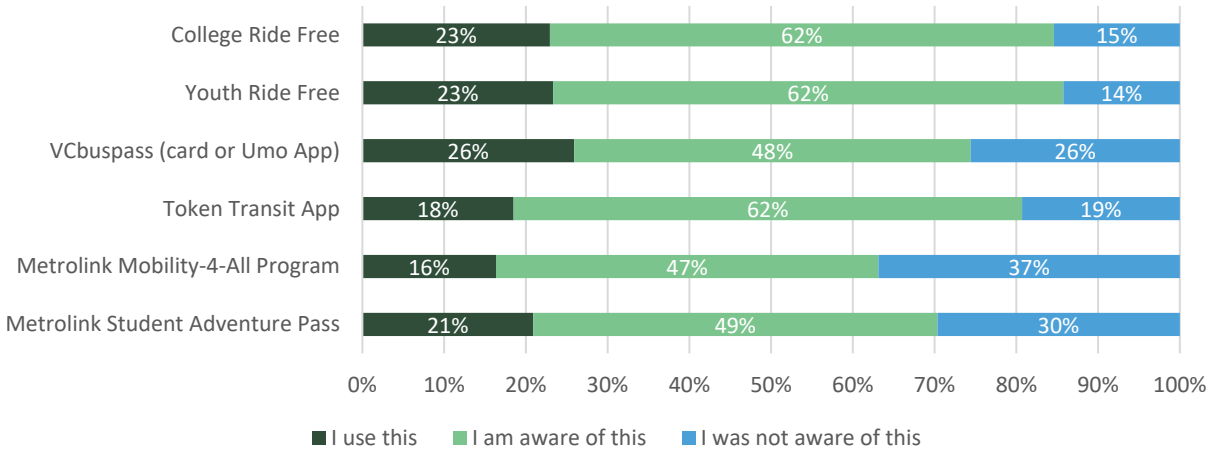
The income distribution is relatively similar across age groups in the on-board survey. When cross-tabulating household income to how often the respondent uses transit, people with household incomes above \$100,000 were significantly more likely to use the bus only occasionally, but even 60% of respondents in the highest income bracket use transit almost daily.

Rider (On-Board) Household Income by Age



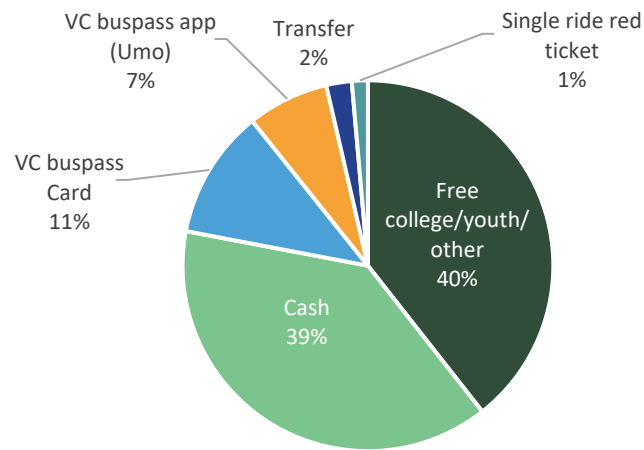
When considering how survey respondent incomes relate to pass availability and awareness of fare programs, we can review both the on-board surveys and the online general public survey. The general public online survey asked all respondents about their familiarity with transit passes and fare programs. Awareness of passes was generally high among those who used transit at least occasionally. Awareness of the Youth Ride Free and College Ride free programs was especially high, but somewhat lower regarding Metrolink discount pass programs. The VCbuspass was the most utilized (26% of current riders) and also had lower general awareness (26%) than the College Ride, Youth Ride, and the Token Transit app. The chart on the following page shows the online survey results for each pass program included in the question.

Online Survey: How familiar are you with transit passes and fare programs in the County?



On board the buses, riders were asked how they paid the fare for that trip. Forty percent ride for free due to their status as college students, their youth, or other reasons (Leisure Village residents ride for free in Camarillo, but represent a low proportion of all riders), while 39% pay cash. The VCbuspass accounts for 18% of all boardings.

Rider (On-Board): Method of Payment



Indications from both surveys indicate that transit riders in Ventura County are disproportionately low-income, but how people facing extreme financial hardship manage their transportation needs is not clear. The online survey responses did not indicate that cost of transportation was a major barrier for most riders, although it was noted by a few individuals who depend on dial-a-ride programs, which are more expensive per trip. It was also not highly ranked as a barrier preventing non-riders from using transit. However, it is hard to say with certainty that these surveys fully capture the perspective of people who are truly facing the choice to pay for a transit trip at the expense of something else, which is something to consider given the proportion of respondents who reported extremely low household income across the age spectrum.

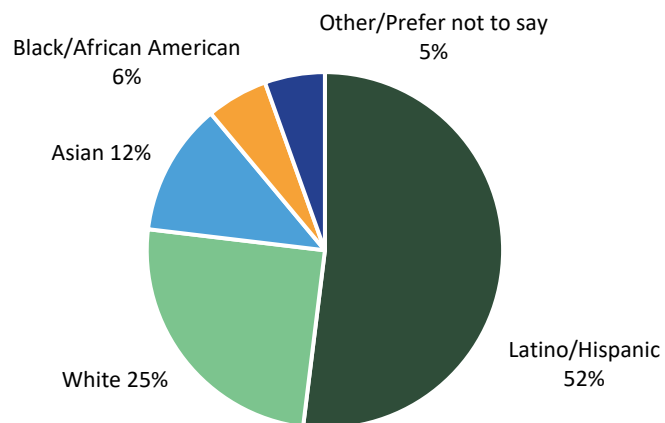
PERSONAL SAFETY ACCESSING AND RIDING TRANSIT

Both community organizations and agency stakeholders raised concern for actual or perceived safety on transit throughout the outreach process. The general public online survey and on-board rider surveys addressed these in several ways. As discussed above, only 5% of general public non-riders cited safety as one of their top three reasons for not using transit.

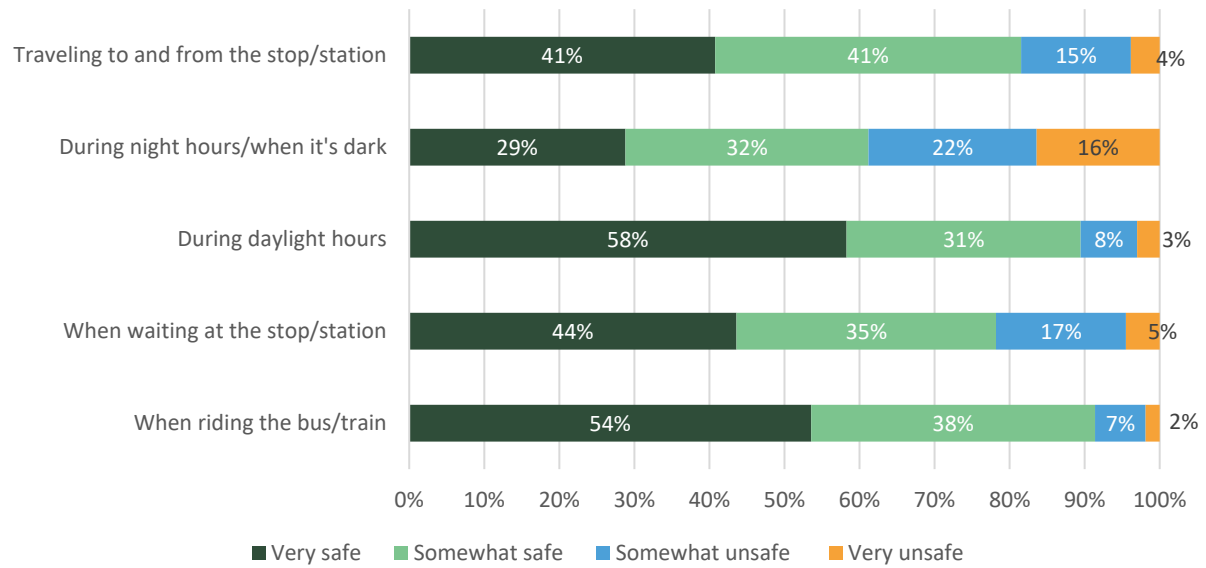
Personal safety is a complex topic and particularly affects some demographics differently than others, particularly women, people who identify as non-binary, and minorities. In the general public online survey, overall response rates were 57% female, with as many as 6% of all respondents also self-identifying as transgender. The on-board survey also received about 6% responses from self-identified non-binary persons, although the proportion of male respondents in the on-board survey was about 51%.

The race and ethnicity of on-board survey respondents was significantly different than that of the online survey. Latinx/Hispanic respondents were by far the largest group, with Asian and Black/African American also slightly more well-represented than the county average population.

Rider (On-Board): Race/Ethnicity



Online Survey: How safe do you feel using public transit

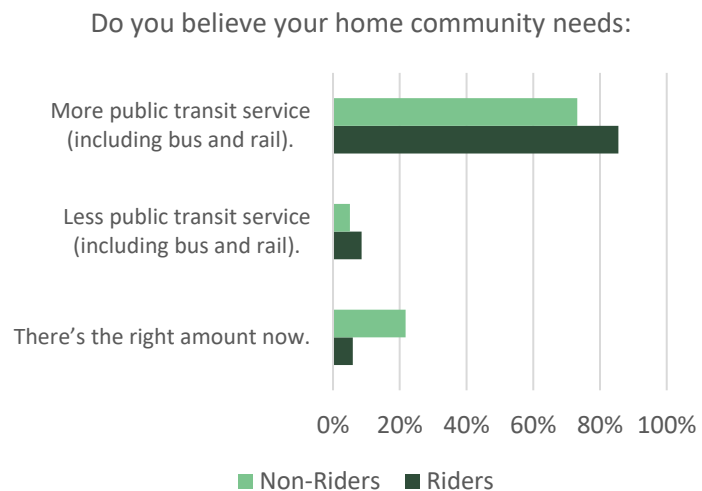


Overall, riders report the highest perception of safety when actually on-board transit, and when waiting for the bus during the day. Unsurprisingly, the perception of safety declines substantially in darkness, and this result is supported by many open-ended comments respondents made about needing improved lighting at bus stops and safer walk access to transit across the county. While only 9% of respondents felt somewhat or very unsafe while riding, such concerns are crucial to address for those riders, and to counter the general narrative that transit is unsafe.

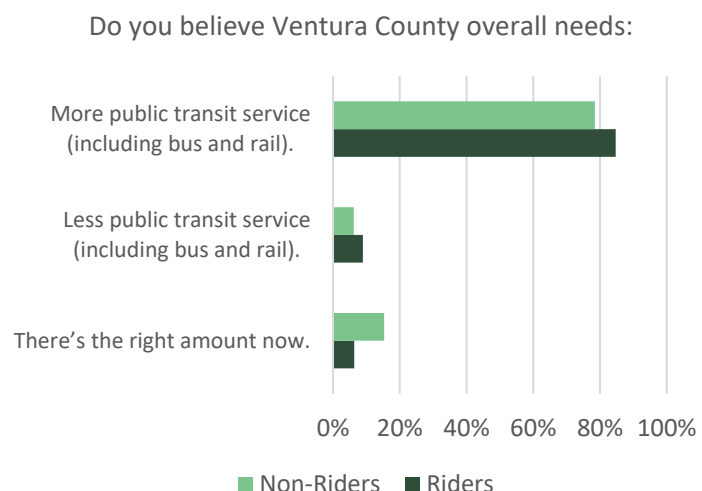
FIXED ROUTE TRANSIT IMPROVEMENTS AND TRADEOFFS

Both the online and on-board survey asked all respondents, regardless of their transit use, to consider several questions that would help the SRTP weigh out what improvements are *most* needed given there are limited resources available. In the general public online survey, respondents were asked questions about the level of service and improvements in their own city (implying local travel) and then the same question for Ventura County overall (implying regional travel). The following several charts show data from the online survey.

When asked about their **home community**, the majority of online survey respondents agreed on the need for more public transit, although as many as 20% of non-riders believe there is the right amount today.



When asked about **the County overall**, respondents had similar beliefs about needing more public transit. Notably, slightly fewer non-riders believe there is the right amount today.



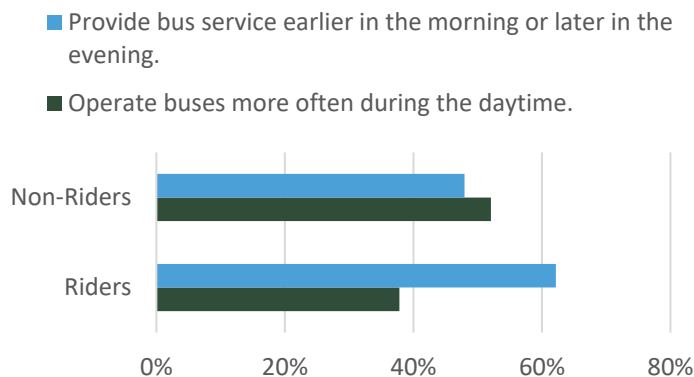
The following series of questions posed a single trade-off to respondents about transit in their home city. These “forced preference” questions help transit planners address the real trade-offs that result from limited transit funding.

First, riders express a clear preference for more peak-period bus service, while non-riders were slightly more likely to favor more frequent service throughout the day.

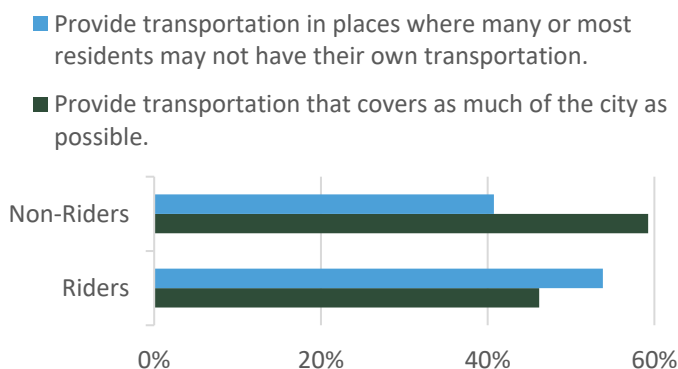
When asked whether cities should focus service in areas where people may not have a car versus greater coverage across the city, respondents seemed relatively split. The open-response comments suggest this question was not useful, because Ventura County is perceived to be so car-dependent that very few people truly have no other option.

In contrast, the following question was very clear that all respondents believe that better bus connections between communities is a greater priority than improved local bus service. This is further substantiated by the many open-response comments focused on the difficulty in traveling across the county on transit.

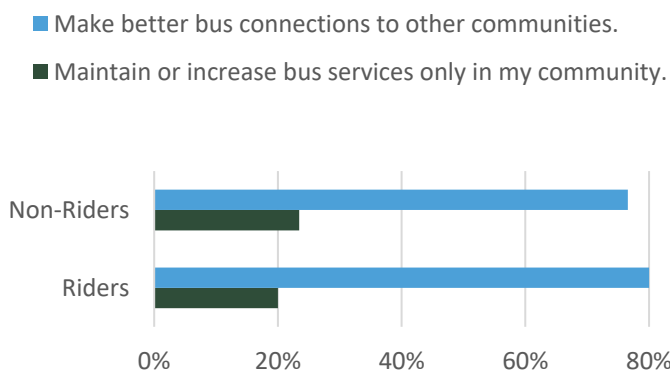
Would you prefer your city:



Would you prefer your city:

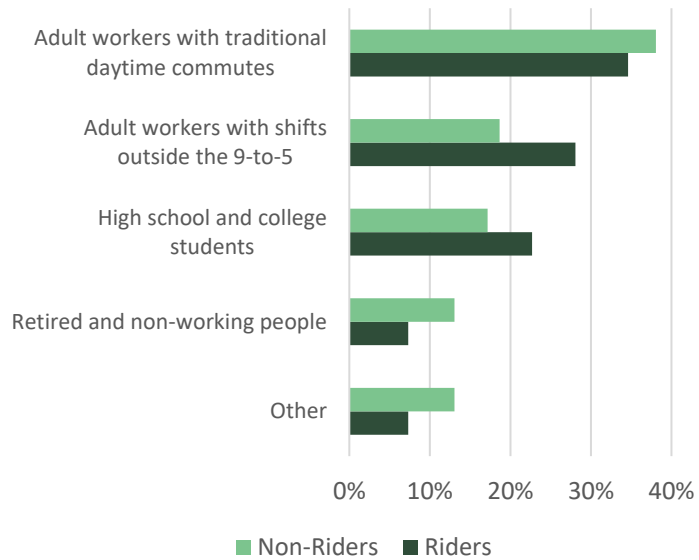


Would you prefer your city:



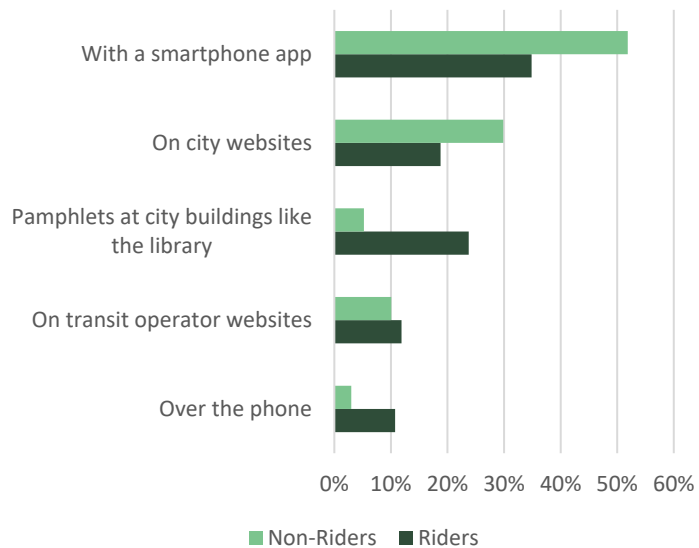
Another theme throughout the project scope and the initial stakeholder engagement is the assumption that travel patterns have shifted substantially following the pandemic and greater ability to work remotely. This question asked respondents to pick one group that was the most important for transit to serve, and although the most common answer still fell along the traditional commute pattern, there were still 20-30% of respondents who believe either better coverage for other work shifts or the needs of high school and college students were the most important. Current riders were notably more likely to focus on workers who have a shift outside the traditional 9-to-5.

Would you prefer bus routes focus MOST on the travel needs of:



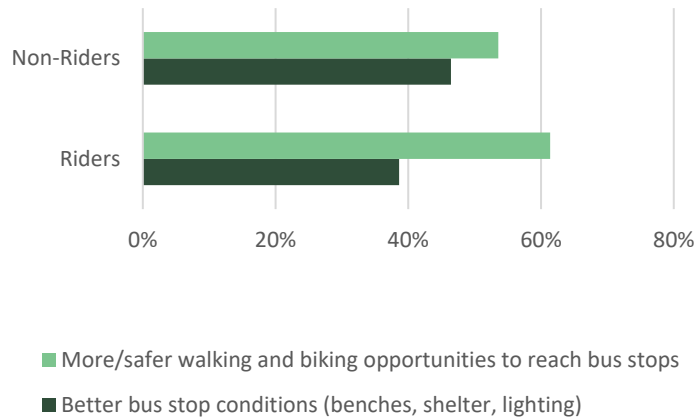
Non-riders were significantly more likely to desire digital information about transit than current riders, who rely on more traditional means, including printed material or the ability to call a customer service representative. Note that a non-rider has to choose (or be inspired) to seek information out regardless of where and how it can be found, whereas riders already know what they are looking for. The Partnerships Plan will address this subject and the importance of motivating non-riders to take interest rather than relying primarily on the existence of the service to attract new customers.

Where would information about using the bus be MOST useful for you:



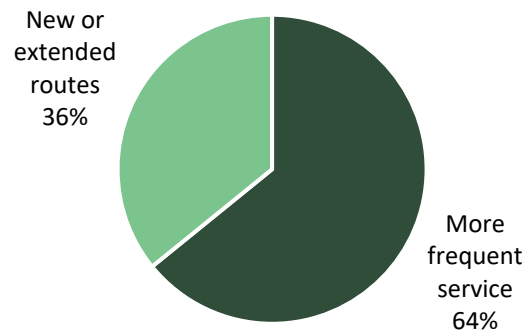
Finally, many areas have bus service but the walking conditions to reach the bus stop are poor, while other areas have a good sidewalk network but little investment in bus stop infrastructure. Both riders and non-riders are more likely to desire better walking and biking conditions to reach transit, but the conditions of bus stops are still highly important.

Which do you believe your city needs MOST:



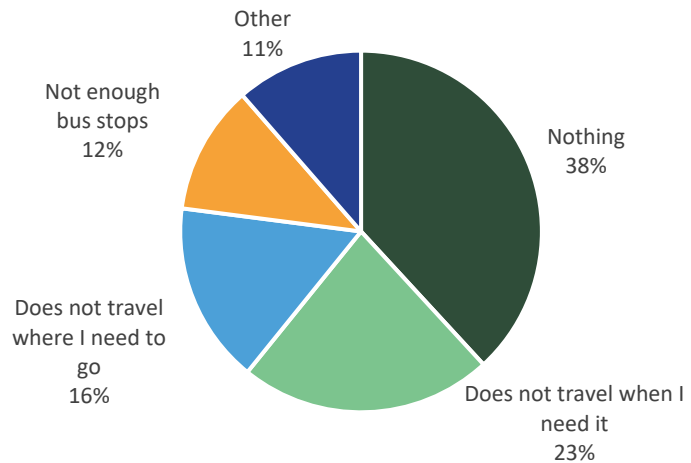
The on-board survey also asked riders to choose among various service improvements. Respondents expressed a strong preference for greater frequency on existing routes (64%) over new or extended routes to new places (36%). Riders' opinions were mixed on service later in the evening (51%) versus more frequent service during the day (49%).

On-Board (Riders): Would you rather have:



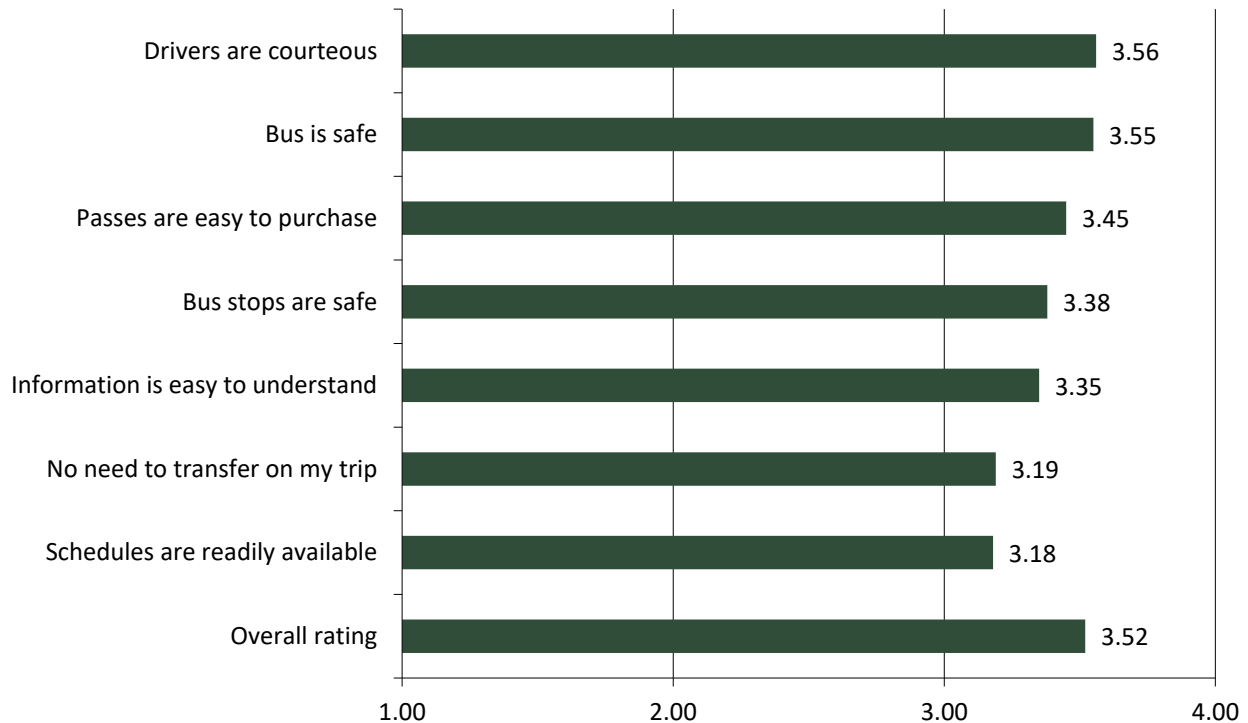
When asked what, if any, factors prevent them from using transit more often, 23% of current riders say that routes do not travel when they need it, and 16% report that routes do not travel where they need to go. However, over one third said nothing prevents them from using it more often, which is likely because most riders are already using the bus most days of the week.

On-Board (Riders): What, if anything, prevents you from increasing your use of the bus?



FIXED ROUTE TRANSIT SERVICE QUALITY

The on-board survey asked riders to rate various elements of service on a scale of 1 to 4 with 1 being “poor” and 4 being “excellent,” as well as to provide an overall rating of bus service. The overall score is 3.52, indicating a high level of passenger satisfaction with bus service. The highest rated items are operator courtesy (3.56) and safety on the bus (3.55). The lowest rated elements are availability of schedules (3.18) and no need to transfer on my trip (3.19).



In designing service improvements, transit planners need to know not only the customer ratings on individual service attributes, but also the importance of each attribute in terms of overall satisfaction. We measure the importance of each service attribute by examining the relationship of each attribute to overall satisfaction. The relationship is measured using correlation analysis to estimate the importance of each service attribute; a higher correlation indicates that a given service attribute is more important in determining overall satisfaction. An index score of 100 is assigned to the average correlation coefficient. Service attributes with a score above 100 are more correlated with overall satisfaction (as measured by the overall rating), while service attributes with a score below 100 are less correlated.

This table shows the Pearson correlation coefficient and the importance score for each

Service Attribute	Pearson Correlation Coefficient	Importance Index
Drivers are courteous	0.850	112.38

service attribute. **Operator courtesy and safety on the bus are most important**, while no need to transfer and ease of purchasing passes are relatively less important.

Bus is safe	0.831	109.81
Bus stops are safe	0.771	101.88
Schedules are readily available	0.768	101.52
Information is easy to understand	0.744	98.33
Passes are easy to purchase	0.684	90.37
No need to transfer on my trip	0.648	85.71

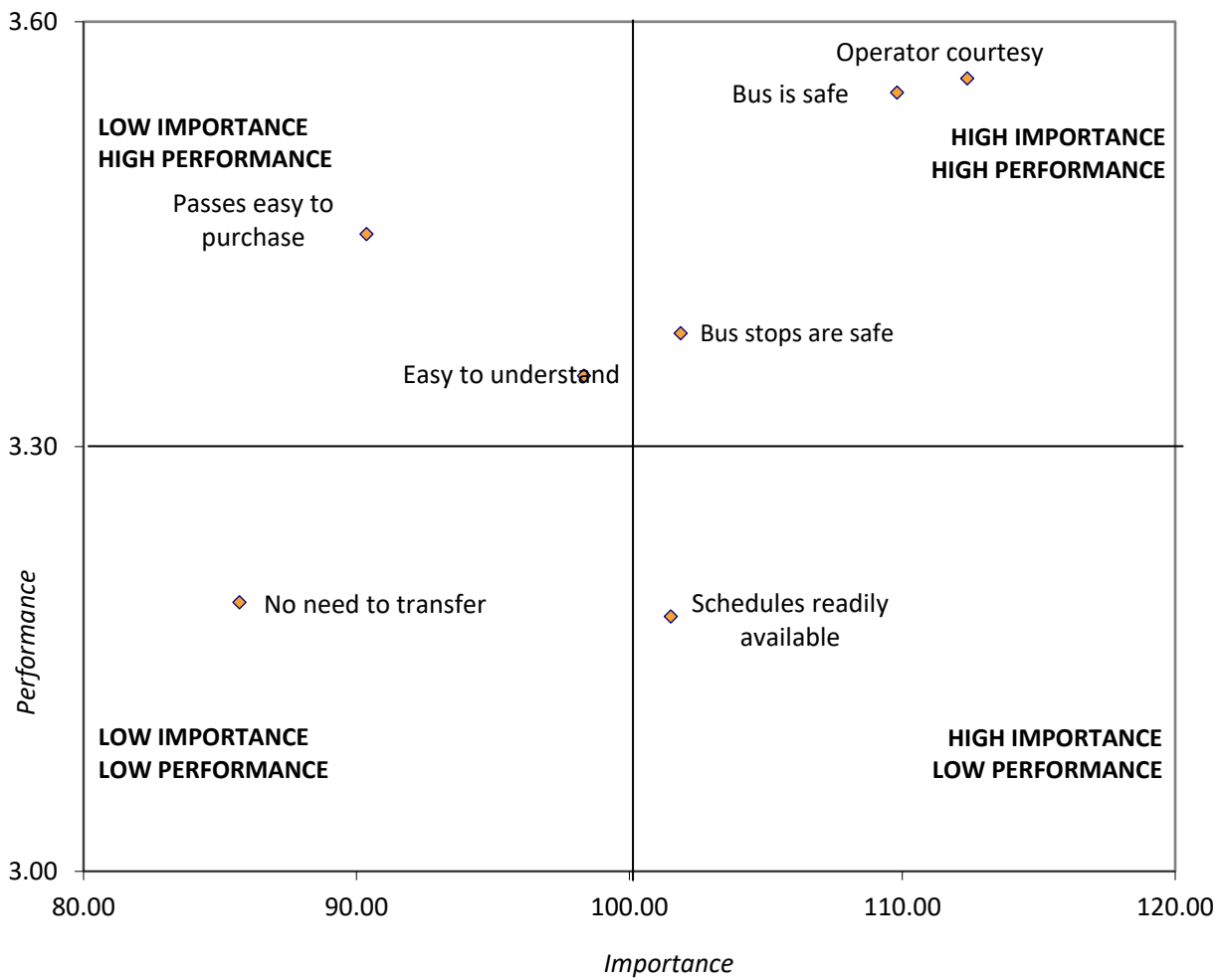
A scatter diagram can visualize the relationship of performance and importance of these attributes, divided into quadrants. This diagram is shown on the following page.

Items in the upper right-hand quadrant represent important attributes with high performance ratings. These are things that bus agencies do well that are important to riders. Agencies should take whatever actions are required to ensure continued high-performance ratings on these attributes. “Operator courtesy,” “safe buses,” and “safe bus stops” are service elements that fall within this quadrant.

Items in the upper left-hand quadrant receive high marks in terms of performance but are relatively unimportant to riders. Often, attributes in this quadrant receive lower importance ratings from passengers precisely because the agency does a good job in these areas. Riders, like everyone else, tend to take areas in which their needs are met for granted. This suggests that agencies needs to continue to monitor service delivery in these areas to ensure high performance, but that these elements of service are not top priorities for improvements. The attributes within this quadrant are “passes easy to purchase” and “information is easy to understand.”

Items in the lower left-hand quadrant are relatively unimportant to riders and relatively low scoring in terms of performance. While performance levels are relatively low for these attributes, these are not strong candidates for improvement due to their low levels of importance to riders. The only element in this quadrant is “no need to transfer.”

Items in the lower right-hand quadrant are key priorities for bus agencies. Riders consider these attributes important, but current performance ratings are less than desired. Only one element is in this quadrant, “schedules are readily available.”



DEMAND-RESPONSE RIDER SURVEYS

Customers of the demand-response programs (typically dial-a-ride in Ventura County communities), which include paratransit-eligible riders, have different needs and context for using transit from fixed-route riders. A survey was mailed to 3,717 of registered dial-a-ride customers in Ventura County (although not necessarily all those registered are active riders) and over 645 rider responses were returned. At least 660 mailers were undeliverable. The completed surveys represent a 21% response rate.

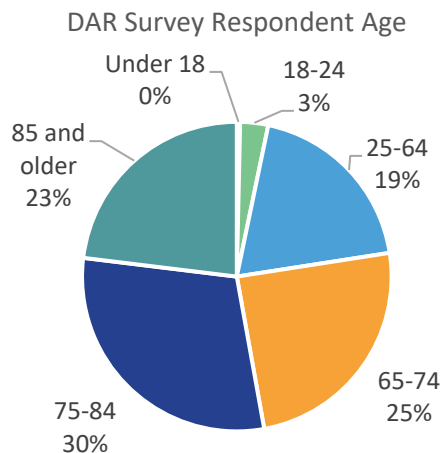
This section summarizes some findings from these surveys, although additional focused analysis will be incorporated into the Countywide Demand-Response Integration Plan. This section will generally refer to “DAR riders” inclusive of anyone who uses demand-response service.

Responses were received for every demand-response program operating in 2024:

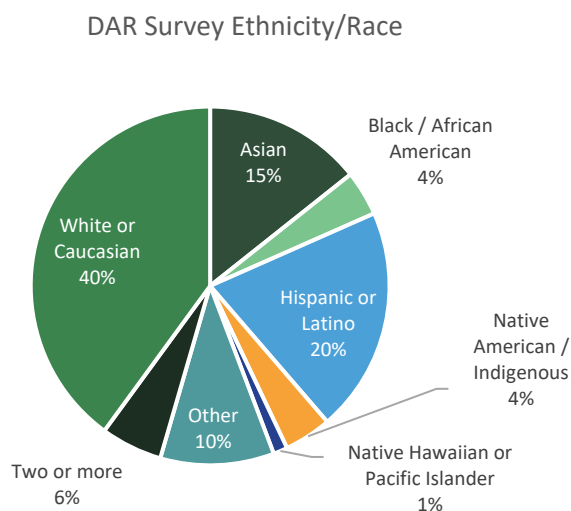
For your most recent trip, which service did you use?	
Camarillo Area Transit Dial-a-Ride	99
CONNECT intercity Dial-a-Ride	16
Gold Coast GO NOW	6
Gold Coast Transit GO ACCESS	163
Moorpark City Transit (MCT) On Demand	13
Moorpark Senior Dial-a-Ride	5
Simi Valley Transit ADA/Dial-a-Ride	112
Thousand Oaks Transit Dial-a-Ride	183
Valley Express Dial-a-Ride	17

Many respondents also use multiple services; for example, residents in eastern Ventura County are likely to have used both a municipal DAR and ECTA CONNECT, and others may have used Camarillo Area Transit and GO ACCESS.

DAR customers are predominantly aged 65 and older. In fact, 77% are over age 65 and so this survey allowed for more granular age data which demonstrates that DAR customers range well into their 80s and older.

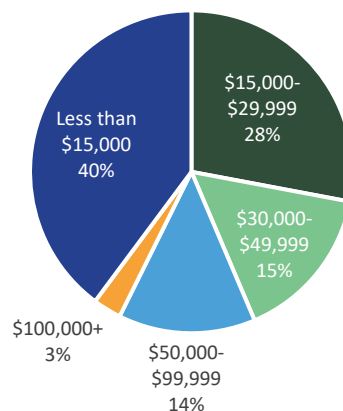


The DAR survey respondents' ethnicity and race distribution is roughly similar to the overall county and to that of the general public online survey results. As with other survey efforts, the DAR survey was available in English, Spanish, and Chinese.



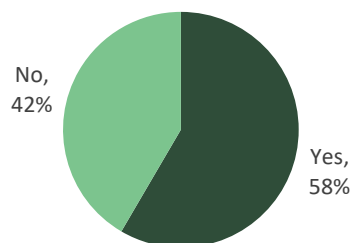
Like other transit riders, DAR customers represent a disproportionate percentage of low-income households. Households earning less than \$30,000 a year in the county are approximately 10%, but almost 70% of riders surveyed fall in this category. Less than 20% of respondents reported a household income over \$50,000. This is also likely reflective of the very high proportion of senior-aged riders who are retired.

DAR Survey Household Income

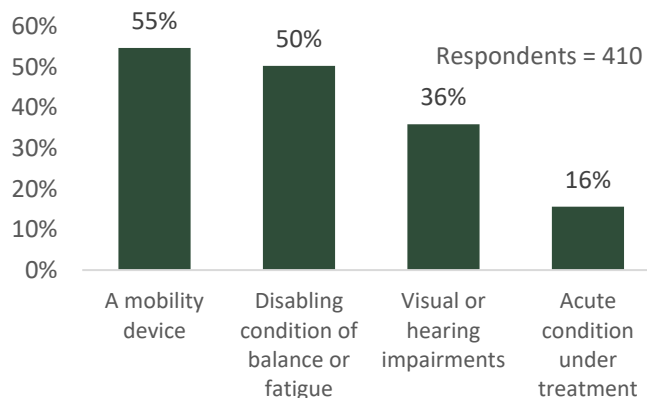


More than 50% of respondents stated that they have a disability. Of those who reported a disability, 55% of those respondents have some type of device they carry with them. This affects the design of the transit fleet to provide sufficient capacity for wheelchair securements, as well as the scheduling appropriate load and dwell times to properly account for mobility issues.

Do you have a disability that impacts mobility?



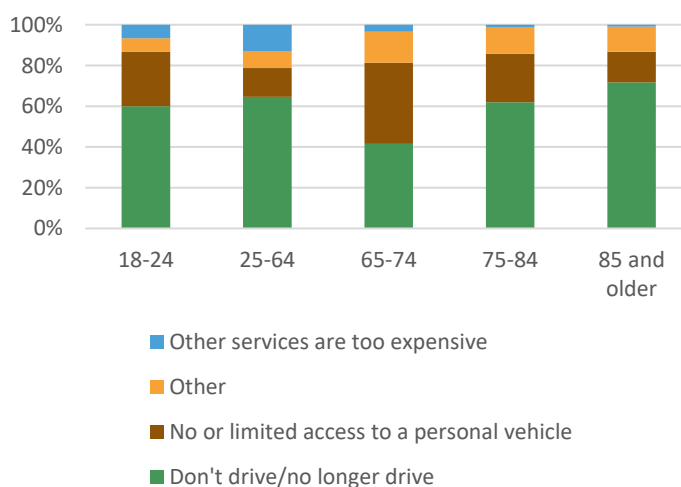
Do you have mobility impacts?



Riders who are under 65 are significantly more likely to have a disability that affects their mobility, primarily because most DAR services are not available to people under 65 unless they have a disability⁴. However, riders over 65 surprisingly were not significantly more likely to report having a disability that affects their mobility; the proportion was about the same in each age group from 65 and up.

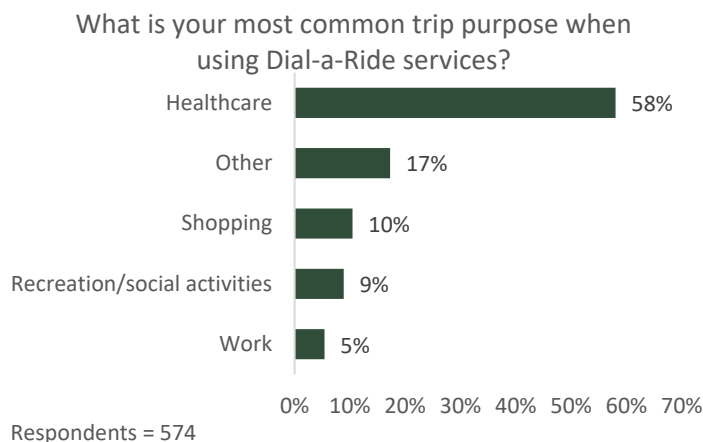
However, ability or comfort with driving is a significant factor. Riders were asked the reason for using the DAR service and the majority across all ages stated they don't or no longer drive, and access to a personal vehicle is also a critical factor.

Reason For Using Service



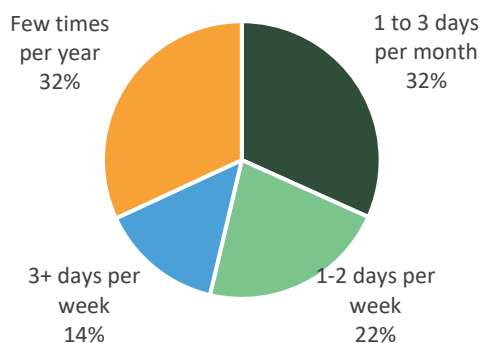
⁴ Camarillo Area Transit offers its Dial-A-Ride program to anyone regardless of age or disability. Valley Express also offers some general public dial-a-ride within its service area. All DAR programs in the County are also open to seniors aged 65 and up, although this is not necessarily required for operating a dial-a-ride program.

By far the most common trip purpose is for healthcare, which emphasizes the critical nature of these services, and how collaboration among agencies, especially for those that transfer, is important. Although healthcare is the predominant trip purpose, riders also depend on DAR for the same variety of reasons others use fixed-route services.



Compared with fixed-route riders, there is a much lower proportion who are riding most days of the week—only 14%—and a high percentage who reported only riding a few days a month. What this may not capture, according to staff, is that a significant portion of the overall trips are made by a relatively small number of very active riders, who sometimes make multiple trips per day.

How often do you use the DAR on which you most recently traveled?

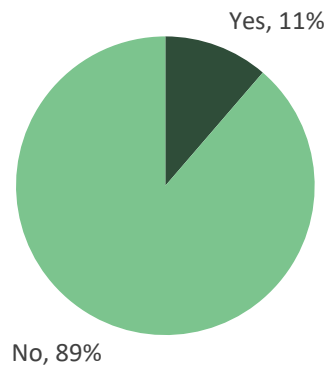


Considering most DAR customers report very low household incomes, price of the service may significantly influence travel behavior.

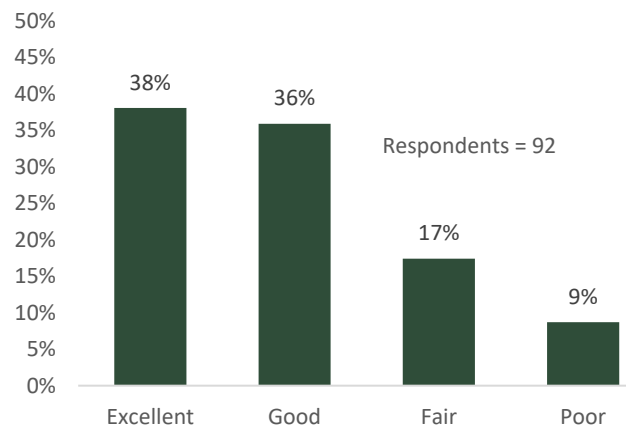
Stakeholders during the initial Phase 1 engagement raised concern that transferring between providers is a greater burden for DAR riders, especially those with limited mobility and people who use wheelchairs or other devices. The survey asked customers if they transfer between dial-a-ride systems. The majority of those who responded do not transfer between systems; however, those who did were mostly happy with their experience. This supports a point raised by staff that very few current riders are making DAR trips that require a transfer.

Although only about a quarter of respondents, approximately 24 individuals, rated the transfer experience as fair or poor, the Demand-Response Integration tasks will consider the specific circumstances and opportunities that integration could offer.

Have you transferred between Dial-a-Ride services?



If yes, rate the transfer experience



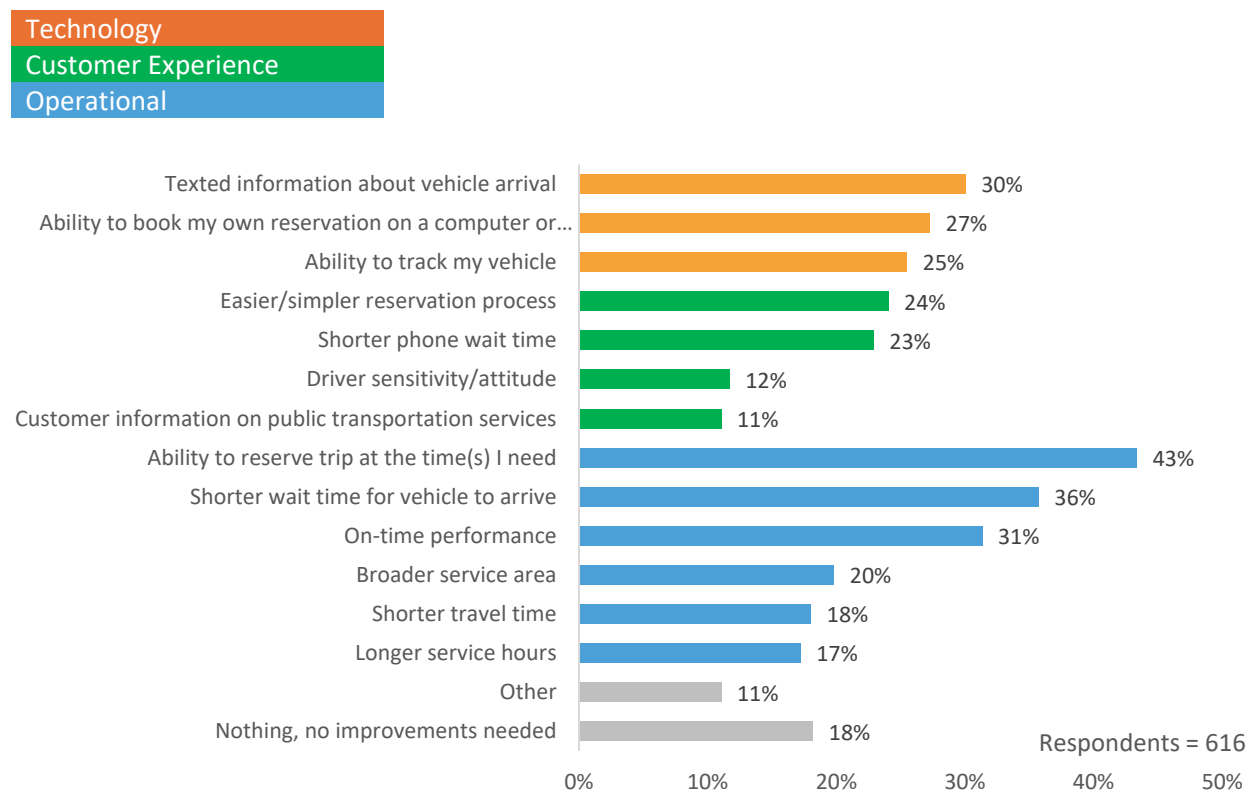
DAR SERVICE QUALITY AND OPPORTUNITIES

DAR riders rated most characteristics of the service highly, although on-time performance was notably lower in satisfaction than all other aspects.

DAR Survey: Quality of Service



Riders were asked what improvements to dial-a-ride services would help them the most. Questions were divided into categories represented by different colors below:



The most prominent responses were related to operations, especially the timing of trips, wait time to be picked up, and on-time performance. Given most riders are primarily using DAR to access healthcare, there is likely significant stress around reaching appointments on time. Respondents were interested in technology, including vehicle arrival notifications, booking reservations online, and the ability to track their vehicle remotely. While these appealed to only 30% of respondents, these results are likely to increase in importance to riders in the future as today's technology will be familiar to future DAR customers.

Overall, relatively few current riders felt that driver sensitivity or attitude needed attention, which further emphasizes that riders highly value and appreciate the high-quality support they receive from the service.

There is more to learn from the DAR surveys that would have implications for the proposed integration of demand-response services in Ventura County. The Demand-Response Integration Plan will delve further into that topic.

Phase 3 Engagement Summary

The first phase of engagement established what transit issues confront staff, stakeholders, and special interest groups. The second phase gathered more details on the issues identified by exploring these subjects with riders and the general public through several surveying efforts. Both phases influenced the design of the existing conditions analysis, and identification of transit needs and opportunities. The project team ultimately brought all of these elements together to develop the Plan's initial transit concepts. These transit concepts are covered in the Short Range Transit Plan – Planning Report.

Phase 3 consisted of multiple in-person and virtual workshops, with the goal of presenting the fixed-route service concepts to the general public. Stakeholder participants and any other contacts from prior phases were invited to participate. In-person workshops were held in Camarillo and Santa Paula, while a virtual public workshop was hosted on Zoom.

Ahead of these public meetings, the consultant team connected with each stakeholder community several times, to collaboratively consider and refine the draft recommendations. Staff input was crucial in focusing several ideas into a more select set of trade-offs to present to the public.

Unfortunately, as with Phase 1, the community meetings (both in-person and virtual) were sparsely attended, despite soliciting participation from a larger stakeholder and community contact list (representing over 140 organizations, businesses and other representatives) developed over the prior year. The few community members who did attend the meetings were inquisitive about the analysis and supportive of the concepts. The team received no feedback that would have significantly shifted or altered the recommendations.

Following this outcome, the consultant team and VCTC staff also reengaged with city staff and County supervisors to solicit further input and direction, primarily regarding the Valley Express service. Specific guidance was needed for Valley Express to support the recommended rebalancing of fixed-route and demand-response services, which would represent a major change in service design affecting several communities. The outcome of these conversations was, again, positive and supportive of the proposed concepts.

FURTHER NEED FOR ENGAGEMENT

Once the SRTP reaches substantial completion, the final phase of public engagement will involve presentations to City Managers and Councils/Boards, and other administrative or advisory committees. This phase will present the final recommendations and educate the general public about the objectives and ideally generate excitement and interest in a reinvigorated transit network.

Following adoption of the SRTP by the Commission, the individual cities, depending on the level and nature of the proposed changes, may need to conduct additional engagement and public hearings to officially adopt and implement service changes.

Following implementation of agency-specific service changes, city or agency staff should continue to engage with riders and non-riders to supplement monitoring performance metrics with qualitative and personal feedback. This helps adjust service as needed and keeps the conversation about transit in the community fresh.

ENGAGEMENT OUTCOMES

The community engagement for the SRTP spanned over a year of ongoing outreach with staff, committees, councils, and stakeholder organizations across the region. These efforts were supported by a strong response to surveys directed towards all transit riders and the non-riding public. Specific and detailed input about routes and service design has helped develop new service concepts which are addressed in the Planning Report. Beyond route and service-level details, these top-level findings are essential in directing future improvements for the whole county:

1. **Investment in better promotion, marketing and materials is crucial.** Stakeholder input and survey data underscore that awareness or understanding of transit is poor. Survey responses show that people believe there is no service to where they want to go or perceive that transit is “not for them.” However, there are many reasons people of all income levels and backgrounds may want to use transit at least some of the time, even if they have a car. In fact, even among current riders, almost 60% have access to a car at least sometimes.
2. **Linking promotion of transit to opportunities through stakeholder groups will grow ridership and improve perceptions of transit.** Stakeholder groups passionately emphasized the need to better inform the public about how transit can be used, and to address conceptions (and misconceptions) about safety onboard. This sentiment was reinforced through responses and comments from the general public from those in favor of transit but unsure how to use it, or untrusting that it would be safe. This uncertainty about safety comes in contrast with the fact that most existing riders report feeling safe using transit in Ventura County.
3. **Greater emphasis on regular local service, with predictable connections to other providers** will go a long way towards making the network more useful, recognizing that increasing actual frequency or transit speed is not likely with the current resources. People perceive the transit network to be sparse with poor connectivity between routes, and therefore have the perception of very long travel times to destinations beyond someone’s home community. Survey responses from the general public and riders indicated the greatest interest in this service improvement.
4. **Extending span of service has the potential to both support existing riders and attract new ones.** Surveys suggested that extending evening service was more important than improving midday frequency. Current riders sought better service to support ‘non-traditional’ work hours. Additionally, riders tend to have lower incomes, which are less likely to have daytime office-type hours. Extending service later in the evening will ensure people have a return trip home from jobs that extend past 5PM. Although the highest number of responses supported improvements to service for traditional work shifts, most services are already oriented towards these patterns and expanding evening service would still benefit traditional 9-5 commuters. Many respondents commented that it was hard to participate in community and cultural activities that happen in the evenings because there is no transportation.

5. **Improved walk access to transit should be a top priority for infrastructure projects.** Both riders and non-riders slightly preferred this option over better bus stop infrastructure. While improved stop amenities are important, the ability for people to safely walk (or roll) a short distance to transit will do more to bring more riders to transit, and stop amenities can follow.
6. **Fare policies and programs should support current riders,** who tend to represent significantly lower-income households than the county average. This subject will be explored in greater detail in the fare policy component of the Planning Report.
7. **Dial-a-Ride programs must take steps to address efficiency, reliability, and predictability.** Although these programs are rated highly overall, the majority of riders use DAR service to reach healthcare appointments, and timeliness and predictability are essential. It can be difficult to get appointments with specialists, so any uncertainty about trip availability and on-time performance will generate disproportionate levels of stress on riders. This was the area of greatest need among current DAR riders.
8. **Better availability of fixed-route transit** should help DAR programs free up capacity. Most riders surveyed were well into their senior years, but many did not report a disability that limits their mobility. This suggests opportunity to provide better route service for non-disabled individuals who currently depend on DAR. This strategy can also reduce the fare burden, as DAR riders are even more likely to have very low household income than fixed-route riders.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INFORMATION

The overall theme throughout the engagement activities and input received was the importance of better marketing of transit service, more robust information, and better connections with organizations that could spread the word. There is no downside to making transit easier to understand and reminding people that it's available for them to use. Failure to address this only perpetuates the problem of low transit ridership.

This point was greatly underscored by the outcomes of the public engagement activities themselves. Despite significant effort on all parts, attendance at the virtual and in-person public sessions was exceptionally low. Consider the following:

1. **Public transit use is low** – because relatively few individual residents use transit locally in Ventura County, it is hard to drum up excitement about engagement. There is simply not a community culture around transit, nor enough people riding regularly to bring up transit in casual conversation the way people do in larger cities. If more people rode the bus, non-riders would be more likely to encounter someone—or several people—who were also riders.
2. **Understanding of transit options is low** – Beyond simply not viewing transit as directly relevant, many people may be legitimately unaware that their community has a transit program. Awareness of Metrolink was notably higher than local bus services. Regardless of general awareness, many people don't understand how it could be useful to them, how to get started using the service, or assume the local transit service they see is only for seniors or people with disabilities. When people are not hearing regularly about transit service and being

reminded of offerings in a way that they can relate to, they can't imagine needing to engage with it.

3. **Central gathering places are few** – Many communities in Ventura County were not developed with centralized downtown-style districts where a project team could effectively conduct intercept surveys and canvassing efforts. “Meeting people where they are” is an effective engagement strategy when communities have a central place with a high likelihood of encountering a broad cross-section of community members at any given time. Given the low density and spread found in much of Ventura County, “meeting people where they are” would be time-consuming and achieve little benefit. The alternative is to host either virtual meetings or in-person workshops that likely require people to drive to them.

The final SRTP will address these issues with actions that agencies, city staff, community organizations, and elected leaders can take. Ultimately, it all comes down to making transit a regular part of the transportation conversation in Ventura County and extending that conversation well beyond the current circles.