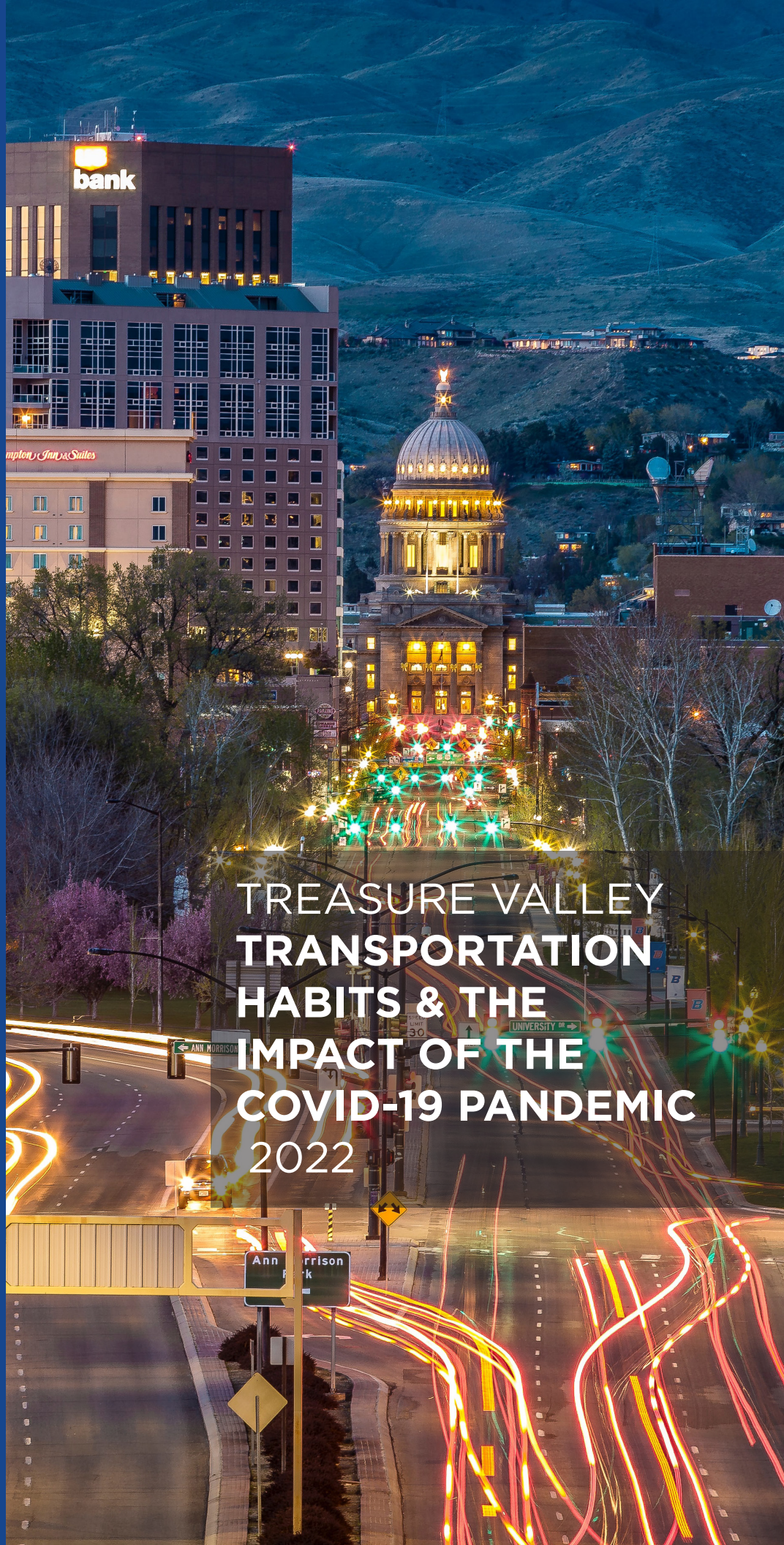


2022

Treasure Valley Transportation Habits & the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic 2022

Matthew May
Boise State University

Emily Pape
Boise State University



TREASURE VALLEY
TRANSPORTATION
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BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY
IDAHO POLICY INSTITUTE

TREASURE VALLEY TRANSPORTATION HABITS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Valley Regional Transit is interested in better understanding how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected travel behaviors and perceptions in the Treasure Valley. It partnered with Idaho Policy Institute to create a survey to investigate these issues and collect responses from a sample of Treasure Valley residents. This travel behavior survey was conducted January 4-10, 2022 and surveyed 600 adults who currently live in the Treasure Valley (Ada or Canyon County). The sample is both geographically and demographically representative, with a simple random sampling margin of error of +/- 4.0%. GS Strategy Group conducted the survey using a mixed-mode approach that included cell phone (47%), landline phone (9%), online (40%) and text message (4%). The sample consisted of 427 responses (71%) from Ada County and 173 (29%) from Canyon County.

KEY FINDINGS

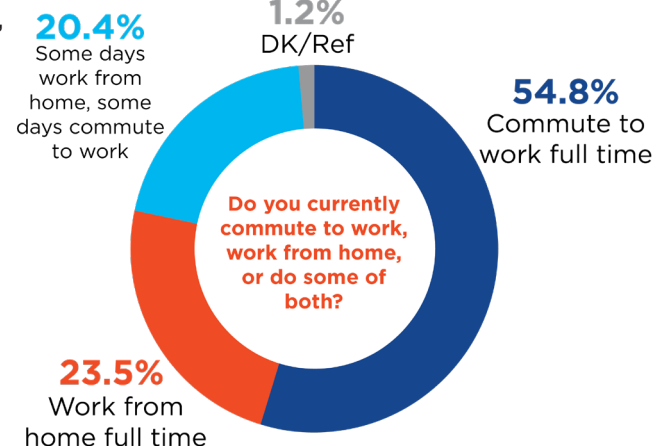
- More respondents report that the situation with COVID in Idaho has stayed the same over the past month (43%), while over a third (36%) say it has gotten worse. Only 17% say it has gotten better.
- While a majority of Treasure Valley residents (54%) say the COVID-19 pandemic has not substantially affected the frequency of their travel around the Valley, over a third (37%) say it has resulted in them traveling less, and 7% say they are traveling more due to the pandemic
- A majority (75%) of Treasure Valley residents say their access to transportation was not impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, while 23% say their access has been impacted in some way
 - Most residents say that growth (89%) has had a greater impact on traffic in the Treasure Valley than the pandemic (6%)
- A quarter of Treasure Valley residents (25%) say they sometimes use alternative means of transportation like walking, biking, or public transportation to get to work or run errands
- More than half of Treasure Valley residents (53%) say they are open to using alternative forms of transportation
 - Almost half of these residents (46%) say the lack of a stop or station near their home is the main barrier, while over a third (36%) say alternative forms of transportation do not get them where they need to go
 - Only 17% of those open to using alternative forms of transportation cite worry over COVID-19 as a reason they currently do not
- Commute time is significantly related to one's openness to try alternative means of transportation, with those with shorter commute times (less than 20 minutes) being more open than those with longer commute times (greater than 20 minutes)
- 80% of respondents agree that the area needs public transportation and 68% agree that existing public transportation is safe

COMMUTING HABITS

Daily commutes to and from work typically constitute peak hours of transportation. About 54% of Treasure Valley respondents report they are currently employed, while 5% are unemployed and 29% are retired. The remaining respondents identified themselves either as homemakers (5%), persons with disabilities (3%), students (2%), or temporarily laid off (2%).

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. Census' American Community Survey reported that 92% of Boise Metro Area workers physically commuted, while 8% worked from home.¹ With commute patterns shifting due to the pandemic and increased telecommuting options, we were interested in identifying how many people in the Treasure Valley still physically commute every day. More than half (55%) of the 323 respondents currently employed say that they commute to work full time, while slightly less than a quarter (24%) said they work from home some days and commute to work on others (1% refused to say). This indicates a substantial increase in telecommuting compared to pre-pandemic levels.

FIGURE 1

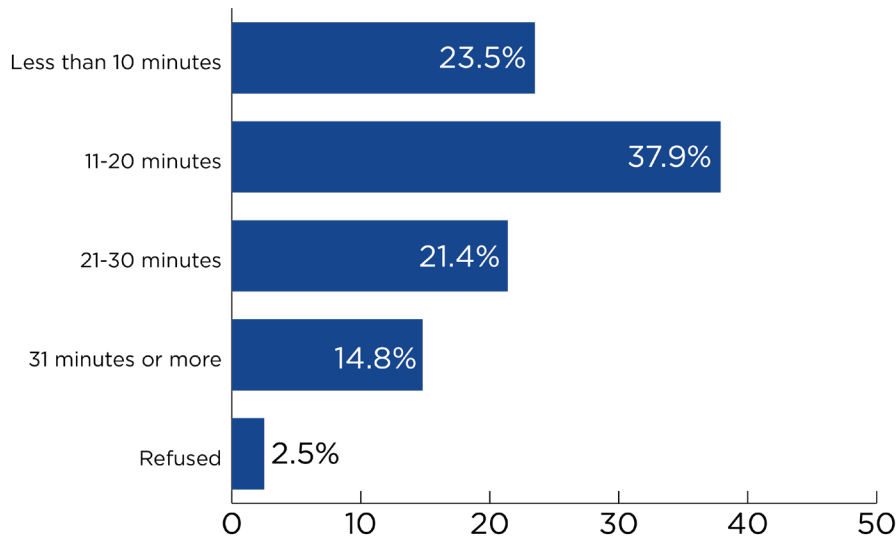


Respondents from Boise commute to work at a slightly higher rate (60%) than those who live in other areas of the Treasure Valley (52%). Conversely, those living outside of Boise are more likely to work entirely at home (26%) than their counterparts in the city (19%). While commuting to work full time was the most frequent response across all age groups, a greater proportion of those age 18-34 (63%) report commuting full time compared to older workers (44-54%). Similarly, workers age 45 or older had the highest incidence of telecommuting (27-31%) compared to younger workers (16-23%). Workers 65 and older (8%) are least likely to split their time between commuting some days and working from home on others, while those age 35-44 (27%) are the most likely. Other age groups range from 18-22%. Additionally, white respondents (24%) are more likely to report working from home full time than non-white respondents (14%).

Research has shown that the length of time one commutes can have a direct impact on their willingness to try alternative modes of transportation. We asked the 243 Treasure Valley residents who said they commute some or all of the time how many minutes it takes them to get from their residence to their place of work. Of these, a majority (61%) indicated their commute was less than 20 minutes, while more than a third (36%) said it took 21 minutes or more. Consistent with research, those with commute times less than 20 minutes expressed greater openness to alternative forms of transportation (65%) than those with commute times of 21 minutes or longer (45%) and the relationship is statistically significant.

¹ U.S. Census 2019 American Community Survey (1-Year Estimates), Table S0801

FIGURE 2: COMMUTE TIME FROM RESIDENCE TO PLACE OF WORK

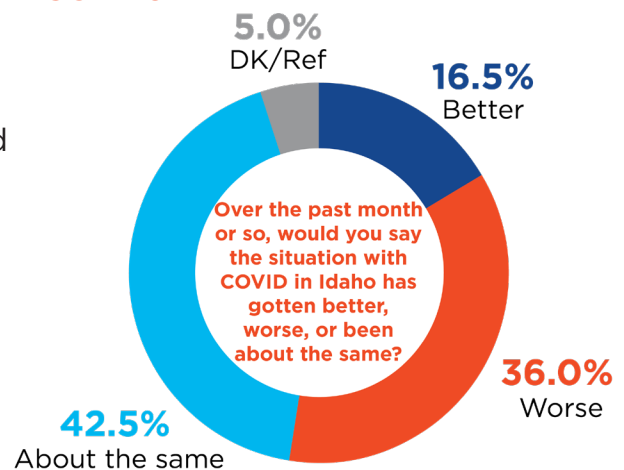


While most respondents report a commute time between 11 and 20 minutes, those age 18-34 (29%) and 35-44 (25%) are the most likely to have a commute 10 minutes or less compared to those 40 and older (13-19%). Only 30% of commuters in our sample indicate their daily commute brings them into the downtown Boise area, while the remainder commute elsewhere in the Treasure Valley.

COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted many aspects of our daily lives and we were interested in determining what—if any—effect it had on Treasure Valley transportation habits. We asked Treasure Valley residents if they felt the general COVID-19 situation in Idaho in the last month had gotten better, worse, or stayed about the same. Residents are split between thinking the COVID situation has stayed the same (43%) or gotten worse (36%) in the last month, while only 17% say that it has gotten better. Notably, response collection coincided with the surge of the omicron-variant of COVID-19, which likely affected some residents' assessment. Those who live in Boise are more likely to say the situation is worse (46%) than those who live in Meridian (32%) or other areas of the Treasure Valley (29%).

FIGURE 3



Most Treasure Valley residents reported that the COVID-19 pandemic did not substantially change their transportation habits or circumstances, but a sizable proportion still say that they have altered their behavior as a result of it. We asked residents if their travel around the Treasure Valley to get to work or for errands had increased, decreased, or stayed the same compared to before the pandemic. While a majority of residents (54%) say their travel has stayed the same, over a third (37%) say it has decreased since the start of the

pandemic and 7% say it has increased. Put another way, 44% of Treasure Valley residents say the pandemic has impacted their travel behavior in some way.

When given a list of choices and asked which item related to the COVID-19 pandemic has most impacted their access to transportation, a majority of Treasure Valley residents (75%) say their access has not been impacted, while 23% report that their access to transportation has been impacted in some way. Among specific impacts, financial hardship (9%) was the most frequent response, followed by increased traffic (9%). A reduced public transit schedule most impacted only 3% of residents, while 2% say they are most impacted by street closures. Financial hardship is more prevalent as an impact among non-white respondents (15%) and those age 18-34 (16%) or age 35-44 (14%). Increased traffic is more likely to be cited by those age 18-34 (12%).

Similarly, an overwhelming majority of residents say that continued growth (89%) has had a greater impact on traffic in the Treasure Valley than the COVID-19 pandemic (6%). Those age 45-54 (93%) and age 55-64 (94%) are slightly more likely to say growth has a greater impact than other age groups (84-90%), but it remains high across all age groups. Similarly, white respondents are slightly more likely to cite growth (90%) than non-whites (81%).

Even so, residents are split on how the pandemic has impacted congestion in the Valley. More respondents say that traffic was less congested (37%) during COVID, while nearly a third say it is about the same (32%) and a similar sized group say it was more congested (29%). Those age 65 and older are more likely to say traffic is more congested (35%) than other age groups (24-29%). Conversely, respondents age 45-54 are most likely to say traffic is less congested. Additionally, white respondents are more likely to say traffic congestion is about the same (33%) compared to non-whites (22%).

One way that cities across the country have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic is by reconceptualizing public spaces to widen sidewalks, expand networks of bike lanes, and dedicate more street spaces for walking and biking at a safe social distance. We asked residents if they would support or oppose such efforts within the Treasure Valley. Most respondents (72%) are supportive of this approach, with 44% indicating they strongly support it, while 21% are opposed (14% strongly opposed). Boise residents (78%) are more likely to support the concept than Meridian residents (64%), but it is favored in both cities, as well as by those who live in other areas of the Treasure Valley (72%).

FIGURE 4

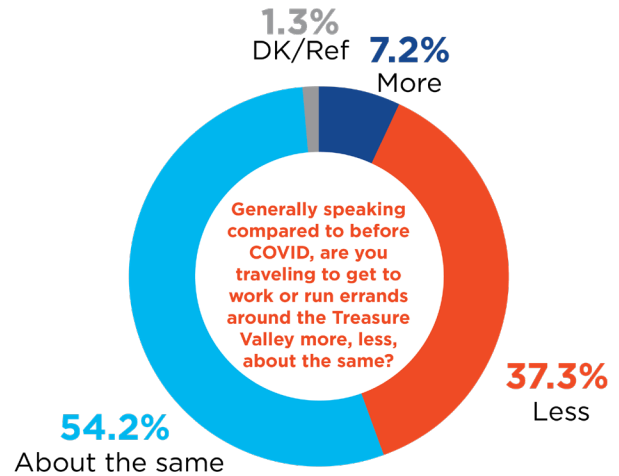


FIGURE 5

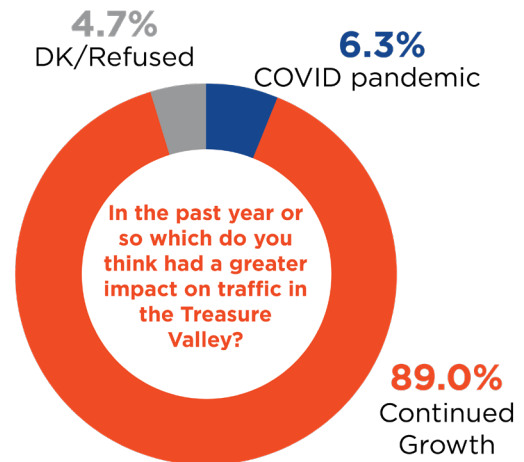
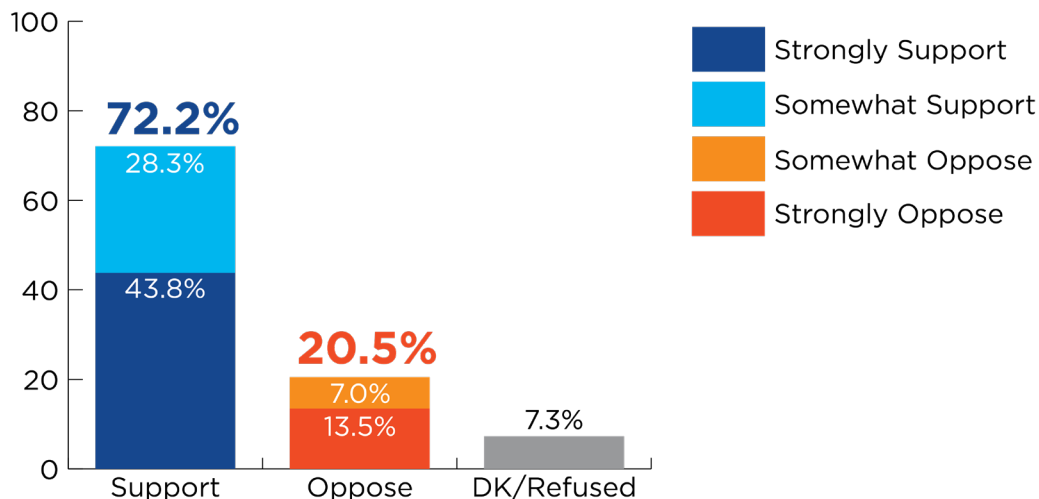


FIGURE 6: SUPPORT OR OPPOSITION OF IDAHO CITIES DEDICATING MORE STREET SPACE FOR WALKING AND BIKING AT A SAFE SOCIAL DISTANCE



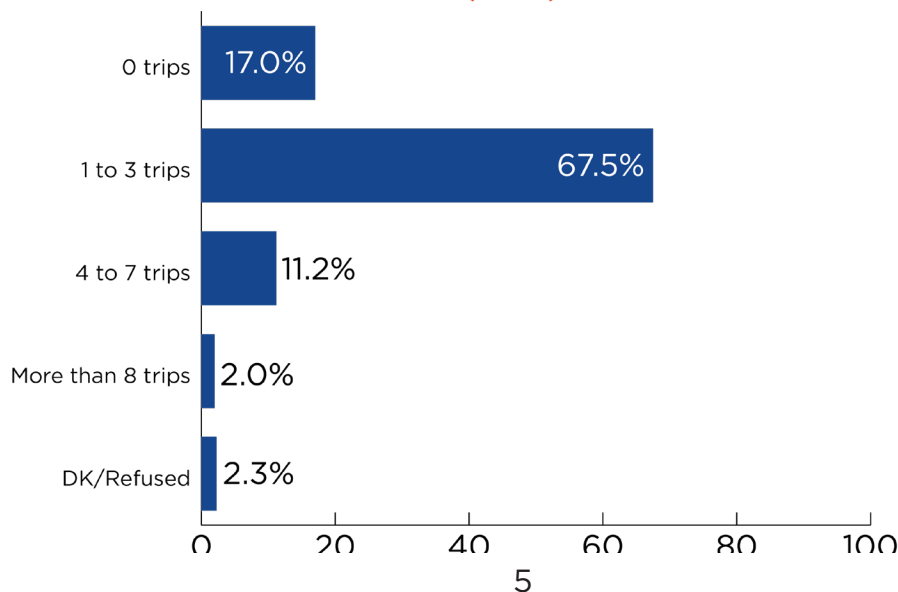
ALTERNATIVE MODES OF TRANSPORTATION

SINGLE OCCUPANCY VEHICLES

High single-occupant vehicle (SOV) usage is typically accompanied by increased congestion and pollution. As such, many cities have adopted goals of reducing the amount of SOVs on the road. In order to determine how prevalent SOV car trips are in the Treasure Valley, we asked respondents to identify both the number of trips per day and the distance they travel each week where they are the only occupant in their vehicle.

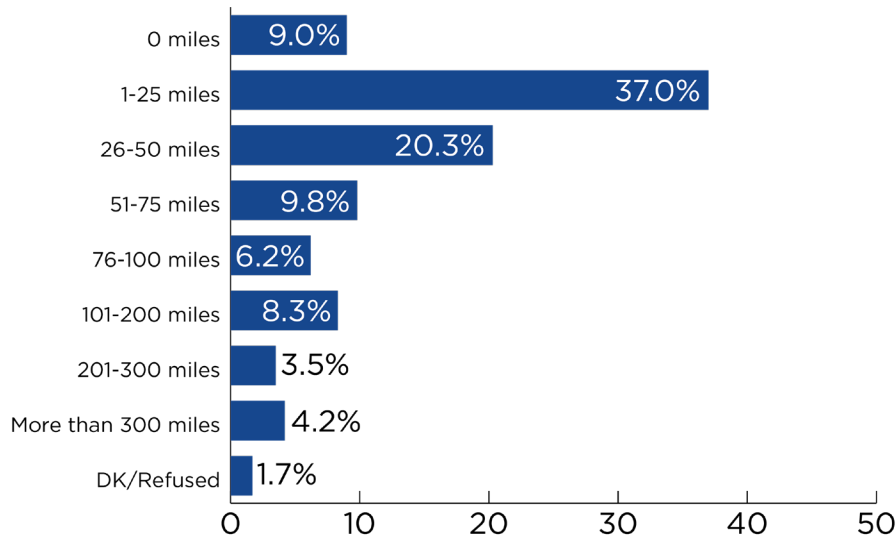
In terms of car trips, the vast majority of residents (68%) report taking one to three trips per day where they are the only occupant, while 17% say they never drive alone. Conversely, 11% say they take four to seven trips per day alone, while only 2% indicate they travel more than eight trips per day.

FIGURE 7: SINGLE OCCUPANT VEHICLE (SOV) CAR TRIPS PER DAY



In terms of miles traveled alone per week, most residents (57%) indicate they drive one to 50 miles per week where they are the only occupant of their vehicle. An equal number of Treasure Valley residents report driving 51 to 100 miles (16%) and more than 100 miles (16%) per week, while 9% say they do not drive any distance alone.

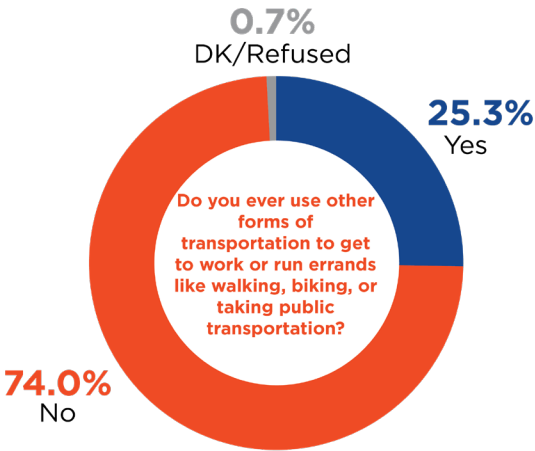
FIGURE 8: SINGLE OCCUPANT VEHICLE (SOV) MILES TRAVELED PER WEEK



MODE SHIFT

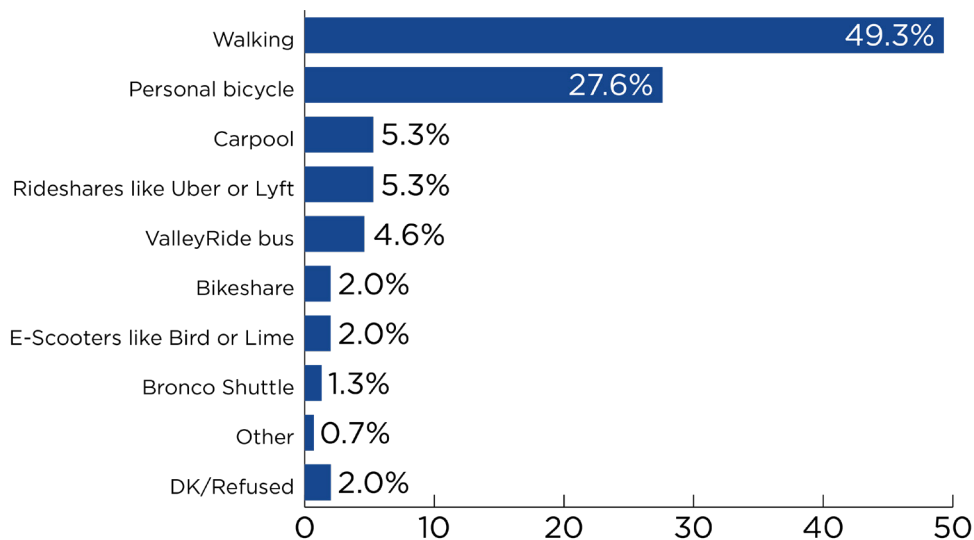
One way that cities and counties have sought to decrease SOV usage has been to encourage other modes of transportation, such as walking, biking, or taking the bus. A quarter of Treasure Valley residents (25%) said that they have used alternative forms of transportation to get to work or run errands, while most (74%) had not. Use of alternative transportation modes is much higher in Boise (37%) than in Meridian (20%) or other areas of the Treasure Valley (17%). Similarly, use is higher among those age 18-34 (29%) and age 35-44 (30%) than among other age groups (19-26%).

FIGURE 9



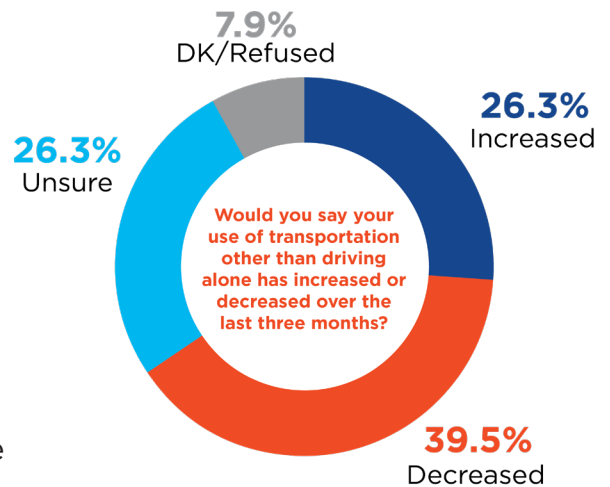
Out of the 152 respondents who use other transportation modes, just under half (49%) say walking is their main alternative method to get to work or run errands, while 28% said it was riding a bicycle. While carpooling (5%), rideshares like Uber or Lyft (5%), and taking the bus (5%) are the next highest responses, their overall percentages are low. Those age 45-54 are most likely to report riding a bicycle (44%) and taking the bus (15%) compared to other age groups (20-28% riding a bicycle, 0-5% riding the bus). Men are more likely to report riding a bicycle (39%) than women (14%), while women are more likely to walk (61%) than men (39%).

FIGURE 10: ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION METHOD USED



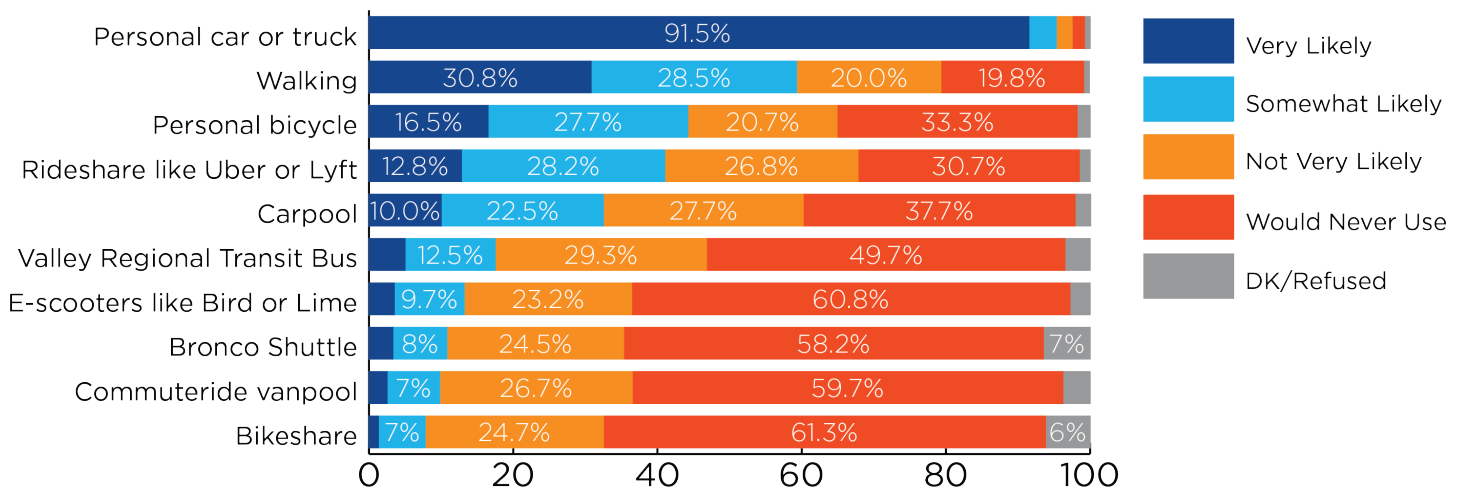
Again out of the 152 respondents who use other transportation modes, 40% report that their use of this alternative method has decreased over the last three months, while a little more than a quarter (26%) say it has increased—a similar amount are unsure (26%). Given that walking was the most frequent alternative mode and the timing of the survey (in the middle of winter), these results are not particularly surprising and may be a greater indicator of weather effects. Those who live in Boise (31%) are more likely to say their usage has increased over the past three months compared to Meridian (27%) or other areas of the Treasure Valley (16%). Men are also more likely to say their usage has decreased over the past three months (43%) than women (35%).

FIGURE 11



In order to gauge how likely a respondent is to use a particular form of transportation, we gave them a list of transportation modes and asked them whether they were likely or unlikely to use it. Personal car or truck (95%) and walking (59%) were the only modes to receive majority support from respondents, although personal bicycle (44%), rideshares like Uber or Lyft (41%) and carpools (33%) received some support. Boise residents are more likely to cite walking (63%), bicycles (48%), rideshares (46%), and the bus (21%) compared to those outside of Boise (walking 57%, bicycles 42%, rideshares 38%, and the bus 15%).

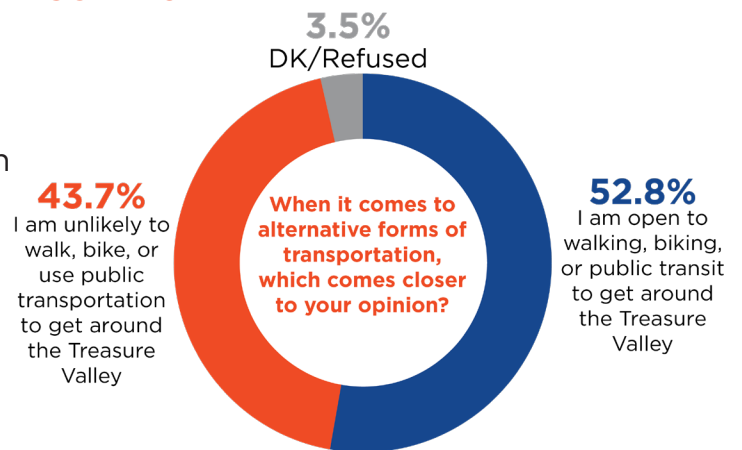
FIGURE 12: LIKELIHOOD OF USING TRANSPORTATION TYPE



Note: Survey questionnaire used “ValleyRide Bus” as a response category rather than “Valley Regional Transit Bus.” As “ValleyRide Bus” is an outdated brand name that is no longer used for the service, the updated name is used for clarity.

We asked residents whether they were open to walking, biking, or using public transit to get around the Treasure Valley. A majority of respondents (53%) say they are, while 44% are not. When considered in conjunction with the question regarding current use of alternative modes of transportation, this suggests that twice as many people are open to using alternative modes than currently use them, which constitutes a potential audience for outreach efforts by mode shift proponents. Residents of Boise (59%) and Meridian (53%) reported being more open to alternative means than other areas of the Treasure Valley (46%). Those age 18-54 are most open to alternatives means (55% or more) compared to other age groups (41-49%).

FIGURE 13

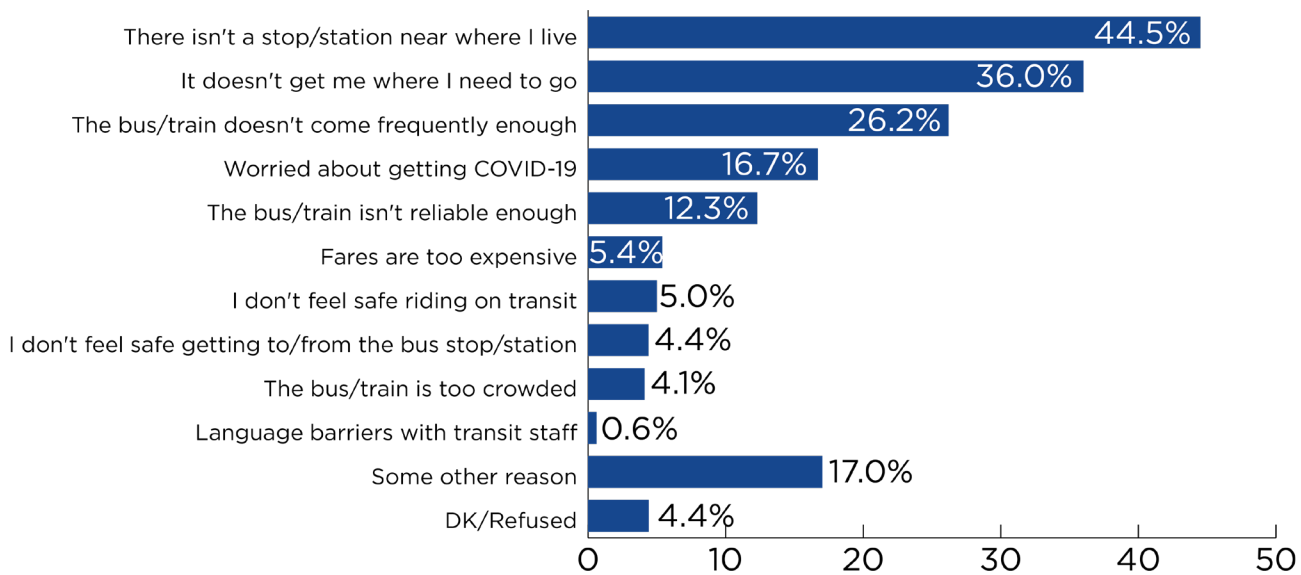


BARRIERS TO USE

With so many Treasure Valley residents open to alternative means of transportation, we were interested in identifying what barriers—if any—are currently preventing them from using them. We presented only the 317 respondents who indicated they were open to alternative means of transportation with a range of possible access barriers.

Of these, 45% indicate they do not currently use alternative modes because there is not a stop or station near where they live, a concern more pronounced among those age 35-44 (47%), age 45-54 (62%) and age 55-64 (56%) than those age 18-34 (29%) and 65 or older (38%). A lack of a stop or station is also more pronounced among white respondents (46%) than non-white respondents (31%) and for those who live outside of Boise, with Meridian (61%) and other Treasure Valley areas (51%) citing it compared to less than a third of Boise residents (30%).

FIGURE 14: BARRIERS TO PUBLIC TRANSIT USE



Another sizable group (36%) say that alternative transportation modes do not currently get them where they need to go, which is more likely to be cited by those age 35-54 (39-41%) or age 65 or older (45%) than those age 18-34 (26%) or age 55-64 (31%). Women are also more likely to name this as a barrier (40%) than men (31%).

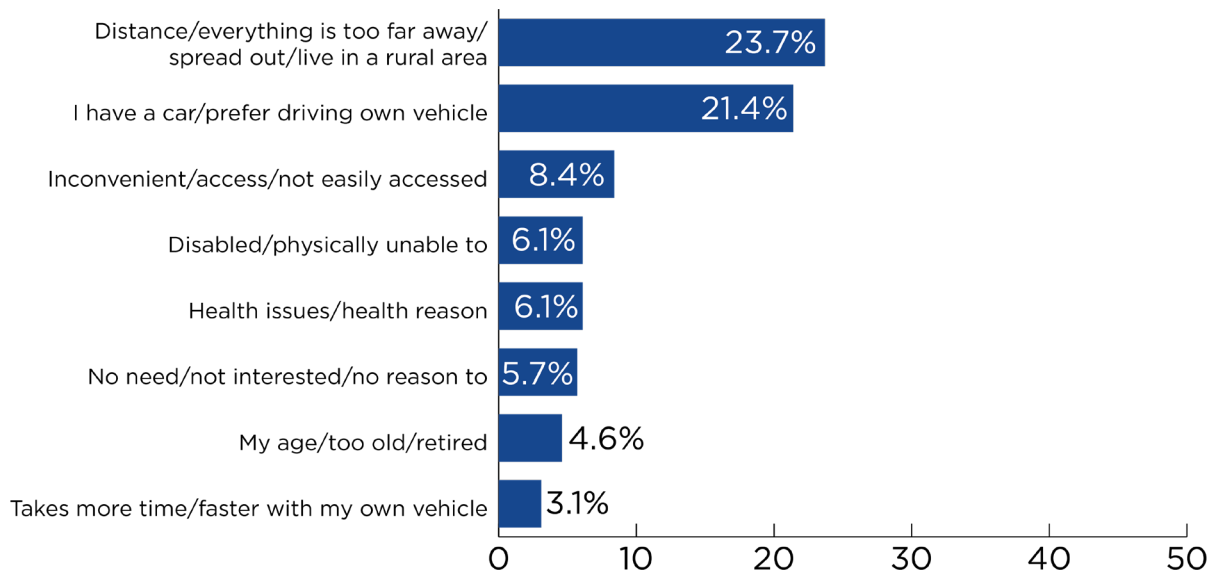
Just over a quarter of alternative-open respondents (26%) say the bus does not come frequently enough, a concern most prevalent among those age 35-64 (29-32%) compared to other age groups (20-23%), as well as among more men (29%) than women (22%).

Only 17% cite worry over COVID-19 as a reason they do not currently use public transit more, although concern was highest among those age 65 or older (30%).

Exploring responses from the other direction, we also asked those who indicated they were not open to alternative modes of transportation (262 respondents) why they were unlikely to use them to get around the Treasure Valley. Residents were free to answer however they liked and these were coded into like categories. While responses varied, the most frequent related to distance, such as living too far away or in a rural area with no service (24%)—a response more common among those age 45-64 (30-31%) than other age groups (15-22%) and among white respondents (25%) compared to non-whites (9%). This was closely followed by people expressing a preference for their own car (21%), strongest among those age 18-34 (40%) relative to all other age groups (11-22%). A preference for one's own car was also greater among non-whites (35%) than whites (20%).

All other responses—including inconvenient access (8%), physical inability (6%), and health issues (6%)—received less than 10% of responses. A preference for driving a car is the top reason among Boise (25%) and Meridian (26%) residents, while other areas of the Treasure Valley cited distance and the spread out nature of rural areas as their top reason (31%).

FIGURE 15: WHY UNLIKELY TO USE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION (RESPONSES >3%)



PERCEPTIONS OF PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

In order to gain a better sense of perceptions and opinions surrounding public transportation in the Treasure Valley, we asked residents how strongly they would agree or disagree with a number of statements related to aspects of transportation services offered throughout the Valley. It is important to note that we asked all 600 survey respondents these questions regarding their perceptions of public transportation in the Treasure Valley, while the previous section about potential barriers were asked only to those who indicated an openness to using public transportation.

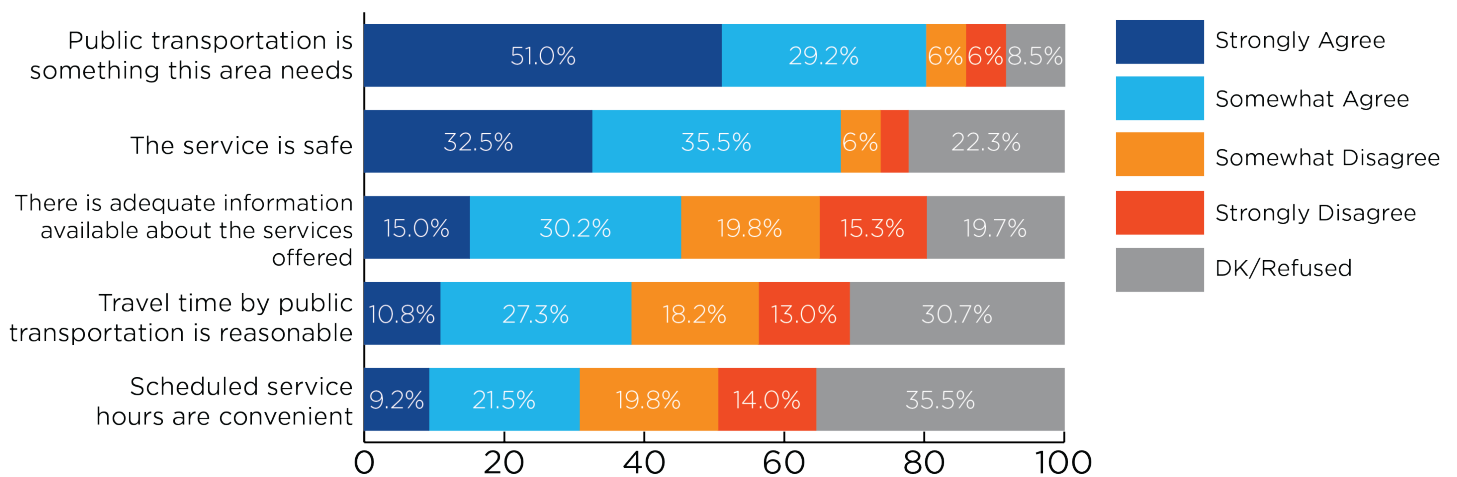
About 45% of Treasure Valley residents agree that there is *adequate information available about the services offered*, with the level of agreement highest in Boise (50%) followed by Meridian (46%) and then other areas (40%).

Residents are more split when considering whether *scheduled service hours are convenient*, with 34% saying they disagree compared to 31% who agree (36% did not know or refused to answer). Disagreement is highest among Boise residents (39%) and lowest among those who live in Meridian (27%)—those who live in other areas of the Treasure Valley are somewhere between the two (33%). Those age 18-34 are more likely to agree (42%) compared to other age groups (26-28%).

A majority of Treasure Valley residents (68%) agree that public transportation *service is safe*, compared to 10% who disagree. Once again, agreement is highest among Boise residents (75%) compared to Meridian (67%) and other areas (62%). It also exceeds 60% agreement among all age groups. When looking at responses by race, whites are more likely to agree (70%) that the service is safe than non-whites (58%).

Residents are again split on whether *travel time by public transportation is reasonable*. While 38% say they agree with that statement, 31% disagree. Boise residents are again more likely to agree (47%) than those who live in Meridian (36%) or other areas (31%).

FIGURE 16: PERCEPTIONS OF PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION IN THE TREASURE VALLEY



Finally, an overwhelming majority of residents (80%) agree that *public transportation is something this area needs*, while 11% disagree. Responses by city follow similar patterns, with agreement highest among Boise residents (87%) followed by Meridian (78%) and the rest of the Treasure Valley (74%).

In order to get a sense of what might convince someone to use public transportation, we asked residents what one thing would have to happen for them to use public transportation on their commute to work. Across a long list of responses, respondents overwhelmingly (43%) say they do not know or did not answer the question. Having stops closer to where they live or work is the next highest response (6%), followed by a more convenient schedule (5%). The only other responses to get at least 4% support include having a train or light rail system (4%) and if their car were broken down (4%).

More Boise residents cite a more convenient schedule (8%) compared to Meridian (3%) and other areas (2%). Alternatively, having more stops closer to their home or workplace was more common among Meridian residents (7%) and other areas of the Treasure Valley (8%) than in Boise (3%).

EMPLOYMENT

Transportation issues do not appear to have substantially impacted employment in the Treasure Valley. Only 5% of Treasure Valley residents said they had to resign or otherwise leave a job in the Boise area due to transportation issues and responses exhibit no regional difference. Those age 18-34 are most likely to report having to leave a job due to a transportation issue (12%) compared to other age groups (1-5%). At the same time, only 13% of residents reported having access to transportation benefits from their employer, school or professional organization.

Among the 79 respondents that receive a transportation benefit, 42% reported receiving a free or reduced bus pass, while 24% had access to free parking. About 20% had access to a carpool or vanpool, while 17% had access to a shuttle service and 15% to bicycle parking or storage. Shuttle service was more likely to be reported by Boise respondents (24%) than non-Boise (11%), while carpool and vanpool services were more likely among non-Boise residents (28%) than Boise (9%).

CONCLUSION

While a majority of Treasure Valley residents say their transportation has not been substantially impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, a sizable number (44%) report that their travel around the Treasure Valley has been impacted. This could be due in part to the increase in work-from-home among residents. That said, more Treasure Valley residents say the COVID situation has stayed the same, as has their travel around the Valley, and continued growth is seen as having a much greater impact on traffic congestion than the pandemic.

Most Treasure Valley residents report taking three or fewer trips per day where they are the only occupant in their vehicle, with a majority traveling less than 50 miles a week. While a quarter currently use alternative means of transportation, almost twice as many are open to walking, biking, or public transportation to get to work or run errands in the future. This suggests there is currently a receptive audience for mode shift efforts. Not having stops close to where they live and/or work is the most common barrier cited, while others note that current service does not get them where they need to go.

These findings provide a useful overview of Treasure Valley residents' transportation habits in 2022. As both these habits and the COVID-19 pandemic continue to evolve, it will be important to keep them in mind as future transportation initiatives are considered.

This report was prepared by Idaho Policy Institute at Boise State University
and commissioned by Valley Regional Transit.

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REPORT AUTHORS

MATTHEW MAY, PHD, Research Scholar
EMILY PAPE, Research Assistant



BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY
IDAHO POLICY INSTITUTE
