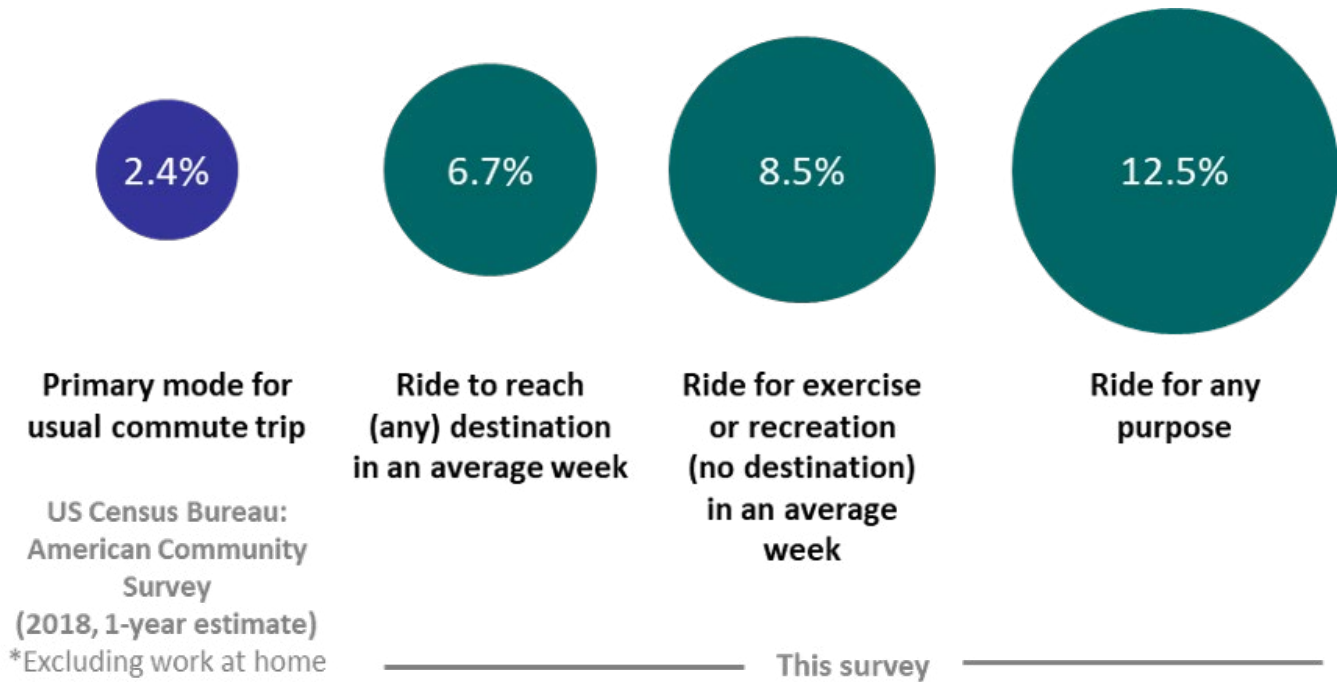


Surveying Silicon Valley on Cycling, Travel Behavior, and Travel Attitudes

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Traveling the streets of Silicon Valley, one can plainly see the predominance of private motor vehicles for transportation. Moving forward though, California aims to reduce automobile vehicle miles traveled (VMT) by 15 percent by 2050, even with population growth, to achieve the state’s greenhouse gas reduction goals. By necessity, that will require greater use of different forms of transportation such as cycling. To better understand current behavior and identify opportunities and constraints to changes in behavior, 1,009 Santa Clara County residents were surveyed about their travel behavior and travel attitudes. While respondents were asked about a range of modes of transportation, the survey was particularly focused on cycling.

Study Methods

The 72-question survey was in the field from March 6 through March 13, 2020. This time frame

is notable, given that this was in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States. However, data gathering occurred prior to the institution of the COVID-related shelter-in-place order covering Santa Clara County. As a result, the results could be considered a reading of pre-COVID behaviors and opinions.

The survey was administered online by Change Research, a national polling firm based in Santa Clara County. Funding for the administration of the survey was provided by the Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition and the Santa Clara County Department of Public Health. Survey design and data analysis were independently conducted and funded by the Mineta Transportation Institute.

Findings

The survey results highlight difficulties in achieving VMT reduction and mode shift goals, while also

showing some reasons for optimism. On one hand, the results confirm the predominance of motor vehicles. Driving rates and vehicle ownership sit at around 90 percent. From a “glass half full” perspective though, the survey finds that 39 percent own bikes and ride them at least occasionally, with 13 percent biking in an average week, for either transportation to any destination or recreation. Comparatively, the US Census Bureau finds that just 3 percent bike, but they only capture commute trips where workers bike most of the way to their jobs. Thus, from a political perspective, cyclists may be a larger constituency than is commonly perceived.

That said, fostering mode shifts from motor vehicles is still a tricky proposition. Respondents clearly indicated that they think they need cars for various reasons and generally enjoy driving. Respondents also rated speed as one of the most important factors behind why they choose to travel a certain way, while cost rated relatively less important. However, people are unhappy with several aspects of the current auto-oriented paradigm. Most say they drive more than they would like, feel too much driving is harmful for their health, and drivers reported being more stressed than other travelers. Additionally, 20 percent find that car ownership is unaffordable. Specifically, for cycling, the survey highlighted several potential barriers to increased ridership, such as land use patterns and a resulting lack of access to destinations, bike parking, professional concerns, and a lack of infrastructure where riders are comfortable. On the bright side, respondents did generally support the idea of increasing the use of alternative modes.

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Policy Recommendations

Notably, the survey revealed that behavior and attitudes vary by social group. Such differences could inform the targeting of interventions and messaging for different groups and identify opportunities for coalition-building for advocacy.

Physically, the results add to arguments for advanced, “protected” bicycle facilities. Respondents were only somewhat comfortable with the idea of riding in “conventional” bike lanes, where cyclists are separated from moving cars only with paint. However, respondents were much more comfortable with the idea of cycling on paths with more substantial barriers between bikes and cars. Whether through facilities or other means, improving cycling conditions for kids in California also appears to be of high importance. Respondents who grew up in California bike notably less as adults compared to respondents who grew up in other US states or abroad.

About the Author

Dr. Kevin Fang is an Assistant Professor of Geography, Environment, and Planning at Sonoma State University. His research interests center on the characteristics of sustainable modes of transportation and their users and how land use and local policy can facilitate or impede their use. In particular, he has conducted recent work on emerging “micromobility” trends in cities.

To Learn More

For more details about the study, download the full report at transweb.sjsu.edu/research/1947



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