

Altamont Pass Commuter Study: A Longitudinal Analysis of Perceptions and Behavior Change

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Orestis Panagopoulos, PhD, Gökçe Soydemir, PhD, Xun Xu, PhD



The minutes and hours spent commuting quickly add up, especially in the Bay Area. Commuters' perceptions of different modes of transportation help them make choices about how to get to and from work, which has effects on the environment, the economy, and commuter safety and satisfaction. Researchers conducted a commuter survey study to examine Altamont Pass commuters' perceptions and behaviors towards public transportation. They compared results with the surveys conducted in 2000 and 2006 to investigate whether there have been any longitudinal changes in the perceptions and behaviors of Altamont Pass commuters over the twenty-year interval. As the previous surveys do, this study focuses on the same three counties—namely, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, and Merced—that constitute the Northern San Joaquin Valley (NSJV).

Compared with the previous surveys, these findings reveal some significant differences in commuter views and behaviors.

Study Methods

Researchers conducted the survey during the period between October 2019 and January 2020. Respondents comprise the California NSJV cohort. In particular, this group contains the residents of San Joaquin, Stanislaus, and Merced counties who commute to the Bay Area through Altamont Pass.

Findings

According to our survey, this group of commuters is relatively dissatisfied with the current system. On the survey's 5-point scale (from 1 being least satisfied to 5 being most satisfied), survey respondents report an assessment value of 2.19 (43.8%) in terms of their satisfaction of the current system in place. Commuters in our survey also

rate their job satisfaction as 3.74 out of 5.0 scale (74.8%).

Demographic attributes show that female commuters have continued to increase over the twenty-year interval. The percentage of commuters 45 years or older decreased in 2019 relative to the 2006 survey. Those commuters who had a bachelor's degree or higher continued to increase in 2019-20 survey by about the same increment as in 2006. Employment characteristics display little change in 2019-20 survey when compared with 2000 and 2006 surveys.

Overall, the results show that general perceptions toward public transportation mode have changed quite notably in recent years. Commuters express a strong desire for ACE to extend to Turlock and Merced, expressway to extend to Tracy.

Policy Recommendations

One immediate recommendation is to provide more flexible hours for trains and buses that extend throughout the day and weekends. Another recommended change is to limit semi-trucks from getting on freeways during the rush hours to improve safety of commuters and increase efficiency of time spent in commuting and cost of commuting.

ACE train schedules are not in sync with commuters' work patterns.

Short-run recommendations vary: e.g. adding a high-occupancy lane and later an expressway that extends to Tracy; measures to relieve congestion areas such as widening the railway bridge after passing Altamont Pass eastward; lowering ACE, BART, and bus fees to encourage more commuters to use public modes; and providing cash incentives and tax breaks to lower the time and money spent on commuting and hence making commuting more viable.

Long-run recommendations involve adding more lanes, widening the existing lanes, and providing a truck route over the Altamont Pass. Another useful recommendation is adding more train routes from the Valley to the Bay Area to alleviate future congestion. This change is important in areas building more homes, particularly in areas such as Tracy, which does not currently have the infrastructure to sustain the influx of population. Overall, adaptations need to be made to sync train schedules with commuters' work patterns.

About the Authors

Gökçe Soydemir (Ph.D., M.Phil.) is the Principal Investigator in this project. He is a Professor of Finance and Economics at California State University, Stanislaus.

Dr. Xun Xu is a co-investigator in this project. He is currently an Associate Professor in the Department of Management, Operations, and Marketing at California State University, Stanislaus.

Dr. Orestis Panos Panagopoulos is a co-investigator in this project. He is currently an Assistant Professor in the Department of Management Information Systems at California State University, Stanislaus.

To Learn More

For more details about the study, download the full report at transweb.sjsu.edu/research/1917.



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