Parks Research Update: 2024 Annual Use Estimates

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Community Development Committee

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Use Estimates Background

- Produced annually since 1995

- Used in formulas to calculate each implementing agency's share of Regional Parks & Trails System grant program dollars

- Allows for monitoring trends over time

- One of two ongoing research responsibilities: Other is Visitor Study, approximately every 5 years

Metropolitan Council

2024 Annual Use Estimates

- The estimates include data from 132 regional parks, trails, park reserves and special recreation features.

- Fourth year of multipliers from the 2021 Visitor Study

- Annual estimated visitation is one way to demonstrate the value of the Regional Park System. Others include climate mitigation and public health benefits

Calculating Annual Use Estimates

Raw Counts

- Parks staff count all people entering all parks and trails at designated locations
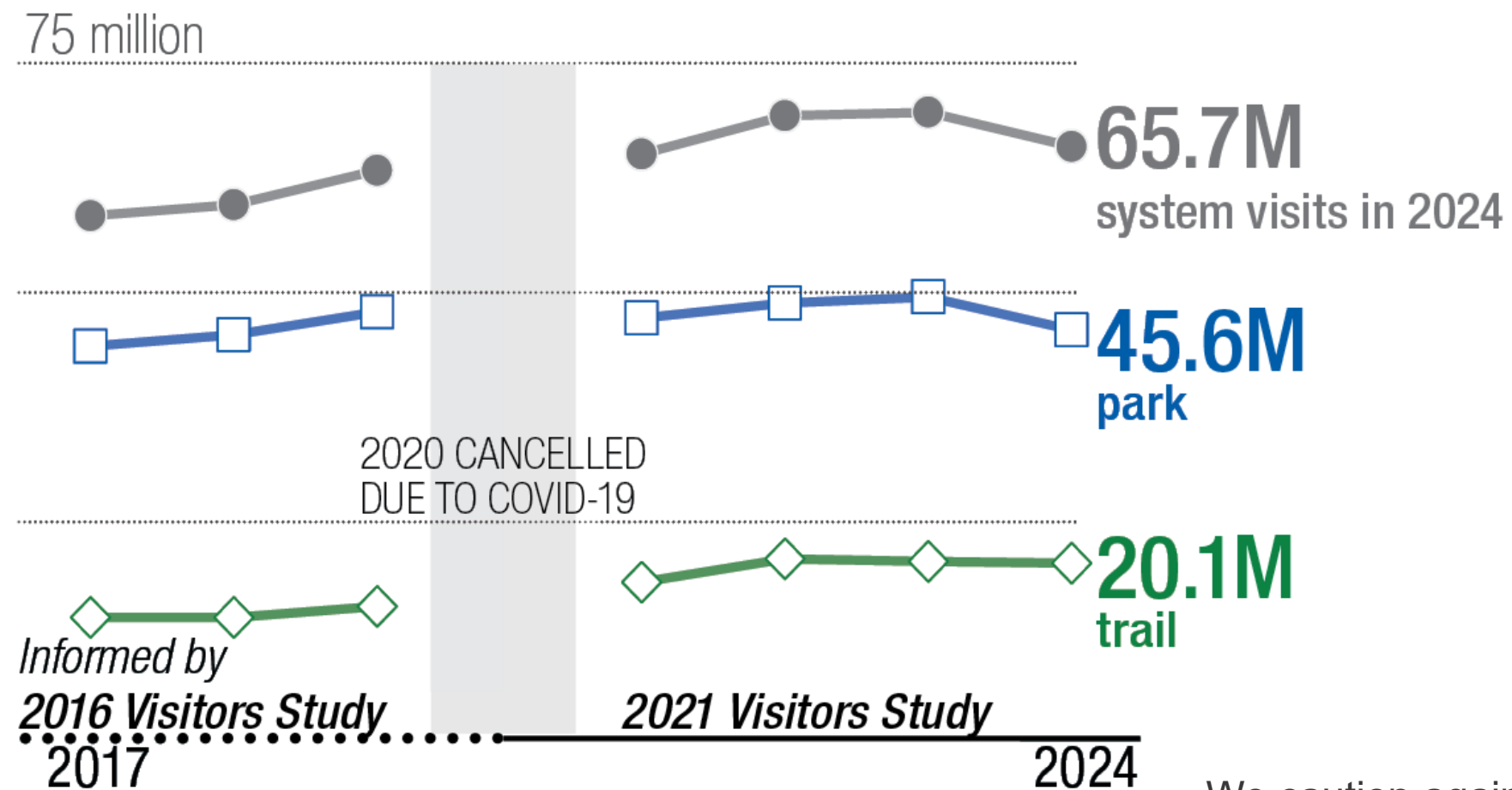- Schedule has randomized times, days, and entrances, Memorial Day to Labor Day (~99 days)

Expansion

- Averaged with previous three years to account for weather, flooding
- Counts are "expanded" to apply to all days and entrances

Special Events / Camping

- Agency-submitted special event, camping use is added in
- Estimated non-summer use based on 2021 Visitor Study multipliers

Metropolitan Council

Annual Visits to the Regional System

75 million

65.7M
system visits in 2024

45.6M
park

2020 CANCELLED
DUE TO COVID-19

20.1M
trail

Informed by
2016 Visitors Study
2017

2021 Visitors Study
2024

We caution against
making direct comparisons
across sets of estimates.

Source: Metropolitan Council's annual parks and trails use estimates (July 2024).

Why did visitation decrease in 2024?

- Typical variation in sample counts from year to year.

- Consistent and frequent rain during summer counts in 2024.

- Variations across agencies – some up, some down. This is typical.

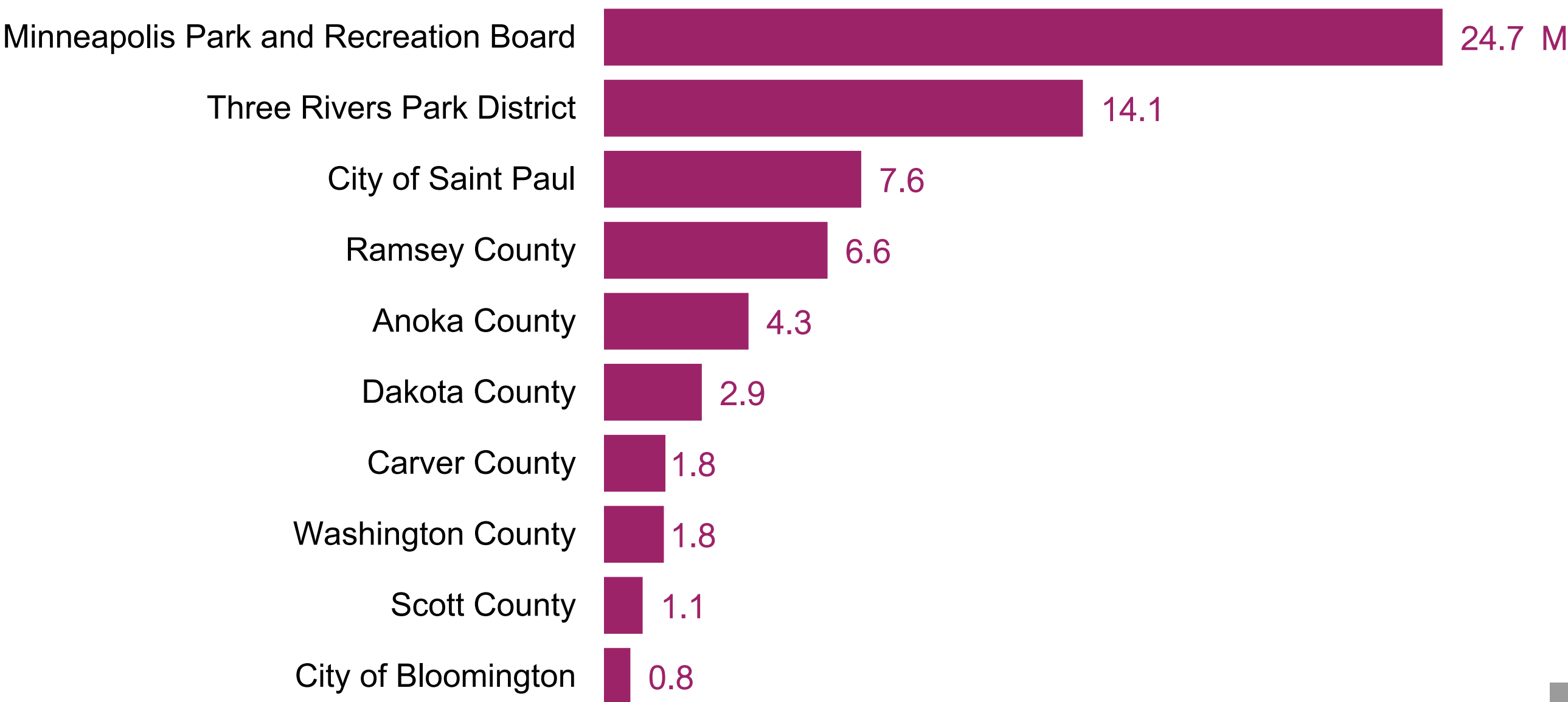- Effects of more years with lower vehicle multipliers from 2021 Visitor Study

Rain was a factor in visitation

- 44% of the summer counts coincided with rain – the summer of 2024 had record-breaking rains according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).
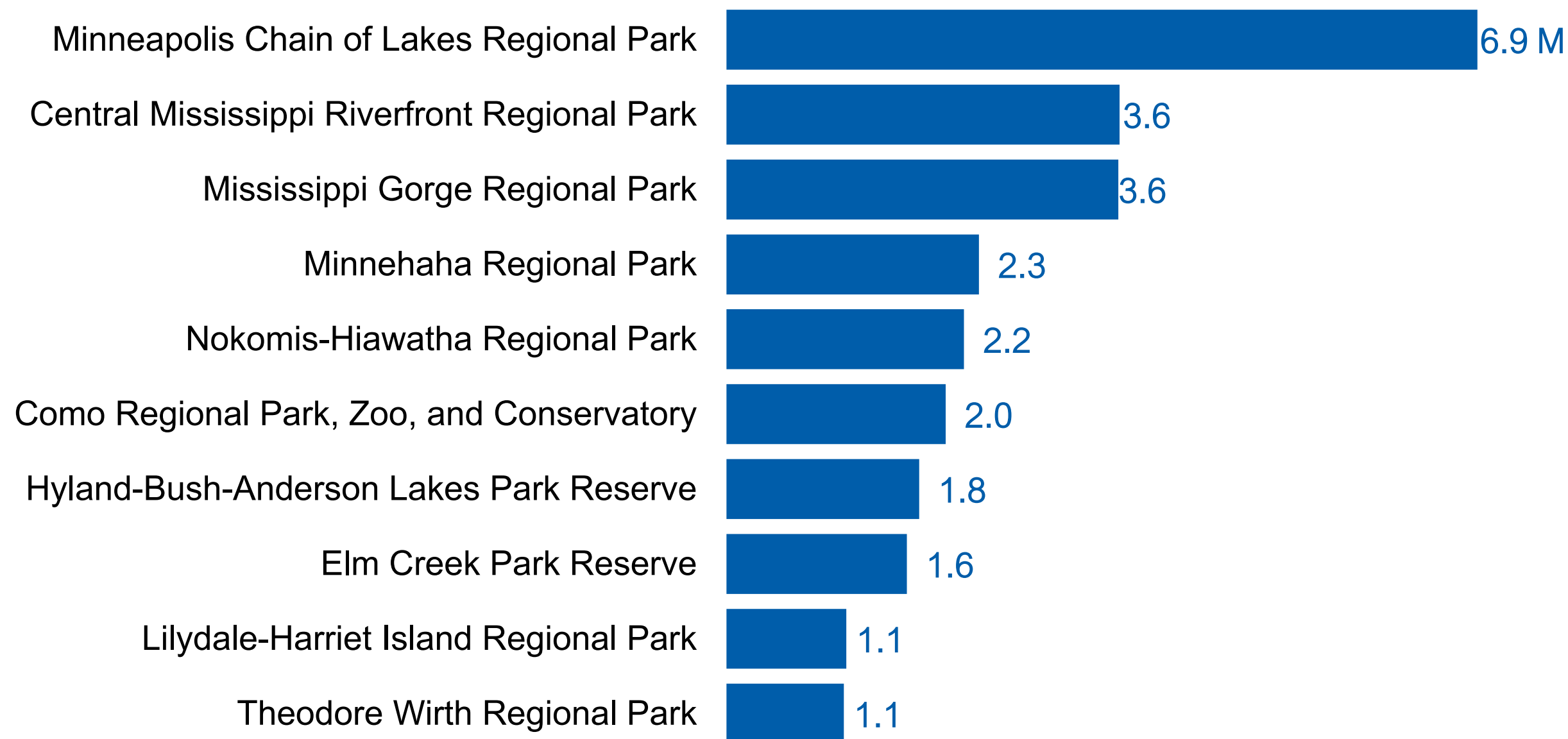
2021	2022	2023	2024
24%	35%	24%	44%

Source: NOAA (January 2025).

2024 Visits by Park Agency

Park Agency	Visits
Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board	24.7 M
Three Rivers Park District	14.1
City of Saint Paul	7.6
Ramsey County	6.6
Anoka County	4.3
Dakota County	2.9
Carver County	1.8
Washington County	1.8
Scott County	1.1
City of Bloomington	0.8

Source: Metropolitan Council's annual park and trail use estimates (July 2024).

Metropolitan Council

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2024 Most Visited Parks in the System

Park	Visits (millions)
Minneapolis Chain of Lakes Regional Park	6.9 M
Central Mississippi Riverfront Regional Park	3.6
Mississippi Gorge Regional Park	3.6
Minnehaha Regional Park	2.3
Nokomis-Hiawatha Regional Park	2.2
Como Regional Park, Zoo, and Conservatory	2.0
Hyland-Bush-Anderson Lakes Park Reserve	1.8
Elm Creek Park Reserve	1.6
Lilydale-Harriet Island Regional Park	1.1
Theodore Wirth Regional Park	1.1

Metropolitan Council
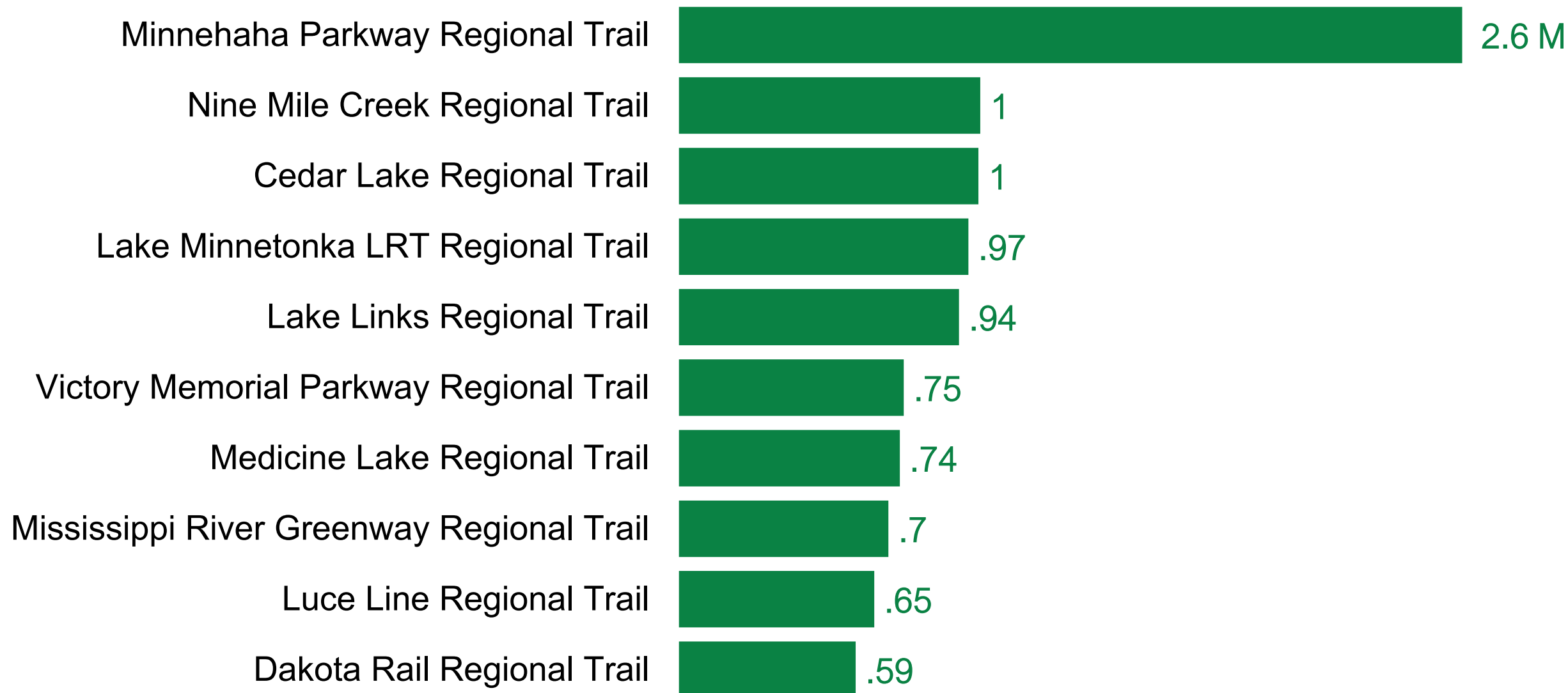
Source: Metropolitan Council's annual park and trail use estimates (July 2024).

Visitor Study Purpose

- Help inform planning, policy, and management

- Evaluate and strengthen equitable usage of regional parks and trails in accordance with *Imagine 2050 Parks and Trails Policy Plan*

- Update data in funding formulas to help determine where funding goes for parks and trails (Use Estimates)

THANK YOU

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