



# 2021 Visitor Study data discussion

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Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission  
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# Visitor Survey Background



- Help inform planning, policy, and management
- Evaluate and strengthen equitable usage of regional parks and trails in accordance with the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan
- Update data in funding formulas to help determine where funding goes for parks and trails
- Only captures summer activities on the day of visit

# 2021 Visitor Survey



- Surveys administered in the field by Wilder Research
- Over 5,400 surveys, over 50% response rate. Survey quotas proportionate to visitation.
- At least 393 surveys per implementing agency. One unit in each implementing agency was “oversampled” to have data at the unit level.
- Data were reviewed and analyzed by Council staff.

# 2021 Visitor Survey Process

Data collection &  
preparation  
Summer/Fall 2021

Funding inputs  
calculated,  
preliminary data  
analysis  
Winter/Spring 2022

Data workshops  
with Imp. Agencies  
& MPOSC  
Summer & Fall  
2022


Publication of  
findings, including  
workshop insights  
Fall 2022



# MPOSC discussion of Visitor Survey

## Timeline of MPOSC data discussions

- August: Overview, multipliers, visitor satisfaction, popular activities (Topics 0, 1, 2).
- September: Brief overview, report out Implementing Agency insights, demographics and disparities (Topics 3, 4).
- November: Data on new visitors, information seeking (Topic 5), Wrap up of Implementing Agency insights
- Fall 2022: Publication of final report.



Implementing agency staff joined five scheduled lunch conversations to dive into operations implications of survey results. MPOSC will explore these topics across three sessions.

# Implementing Agency reflections on Visitor suggestions

## Funding basic upkeep

- Operations funding is chronically underfunded. (Dakota and Carver County, MPRB, TRPD)
- “When we apply for regional solicitation grants, we must guarantee winter maintenance. No such promise is expected for surface maintenance.” (TRPD)
- “Could we charge staffing and maintenance costs back to the Council, like we can for CIPs in other programs?” (TRPD)

## Trail concerns

- “Should a required width be considered for trails to reduce conflict?” (TRPD, St. Paul)
- Trails in mature, centrally located systems can connect city centers to lake front and riverfront regional parks. This is important equity concern. (TRPD, St. Paul)

## More Council data

- Survey agencies to calculate per mile trail maintenance costs. (TRPD)
- More data for individual units, more funding for the survey from the Council up front. (Washington County, TRPD)
- More analysis with data disaggregated by parks vs trails. (Ramsey and Scott County, TRPD)
- Council can provide projections on demographics, residential patterns, so we can plan and prepare for future generations. (TRPD)
- Desire for data about winter activities, local parks. (Ramsey County, St. Paul, TRPD)



# Topic 3: Race/ethnicity & age





# Visitation less racially/ethnically diverse than regional population overall.

Communities of color are underrepresented among park, trail visitors relative to the population.

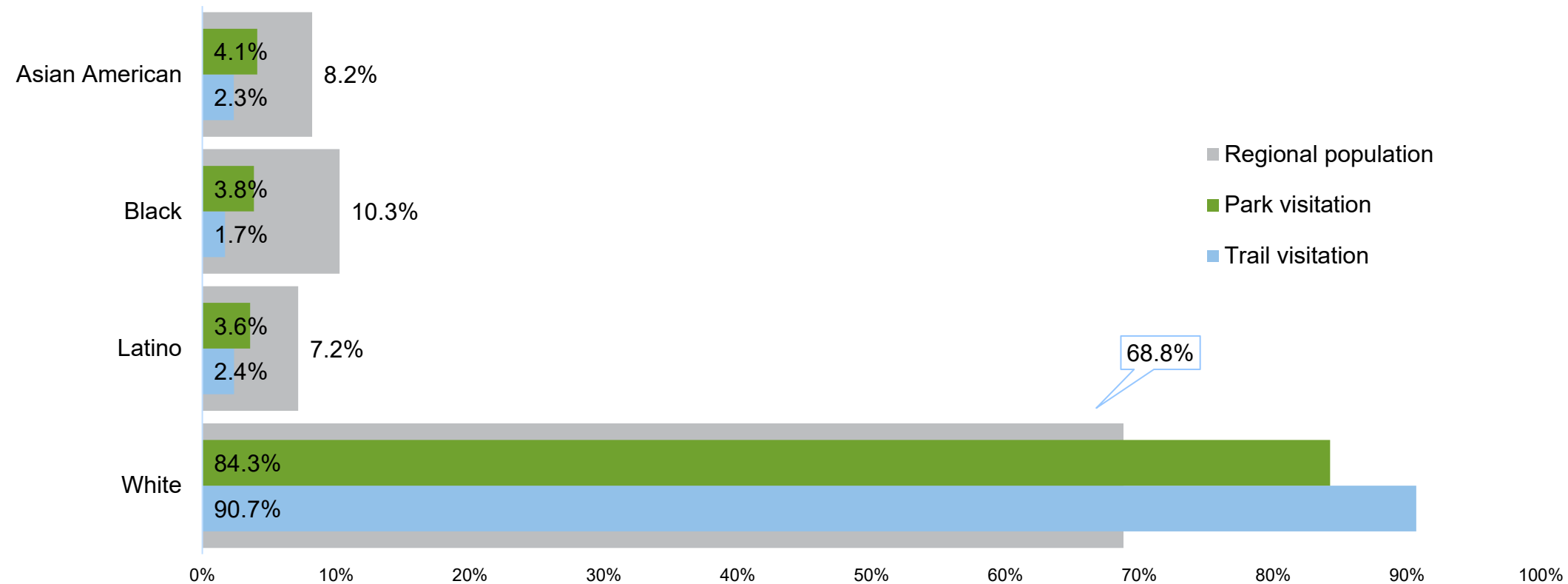


Figure 1: Comparing survey demographics with the regional population for race/ethnicity.  
Source: Metropolitan Council 2021 Parks & Trails Visitor Study.



# Fewer young people visit parks compared with their proportion in population.

Young people are underrepresented among park, trail visitors. Disparities are greater on trails.

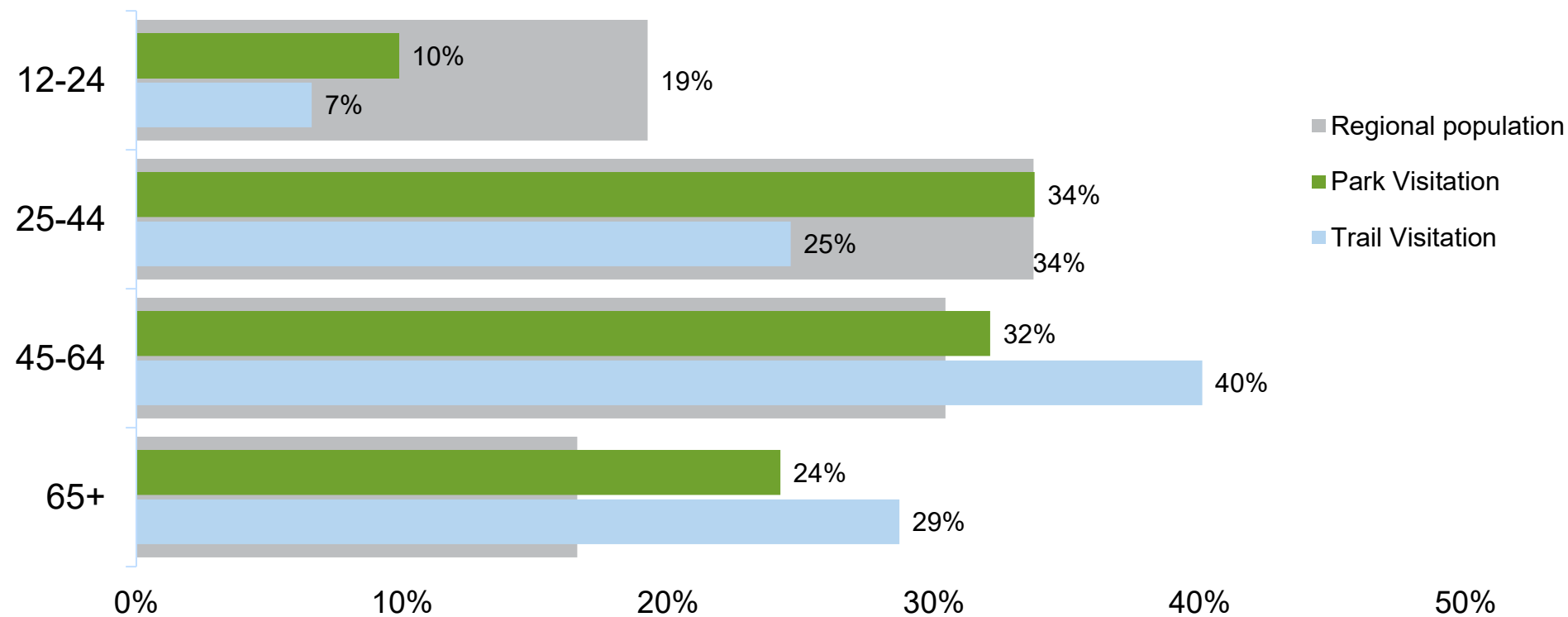


Figure 2: Comparing survey demographics with the regional population for age.  
Source: Metropolitan Council 2021 Parks & Trails Visitor Study



# Higher racial/ethnic diversity among younger visitors

Younger visitors are more racially/ethnically diverse.

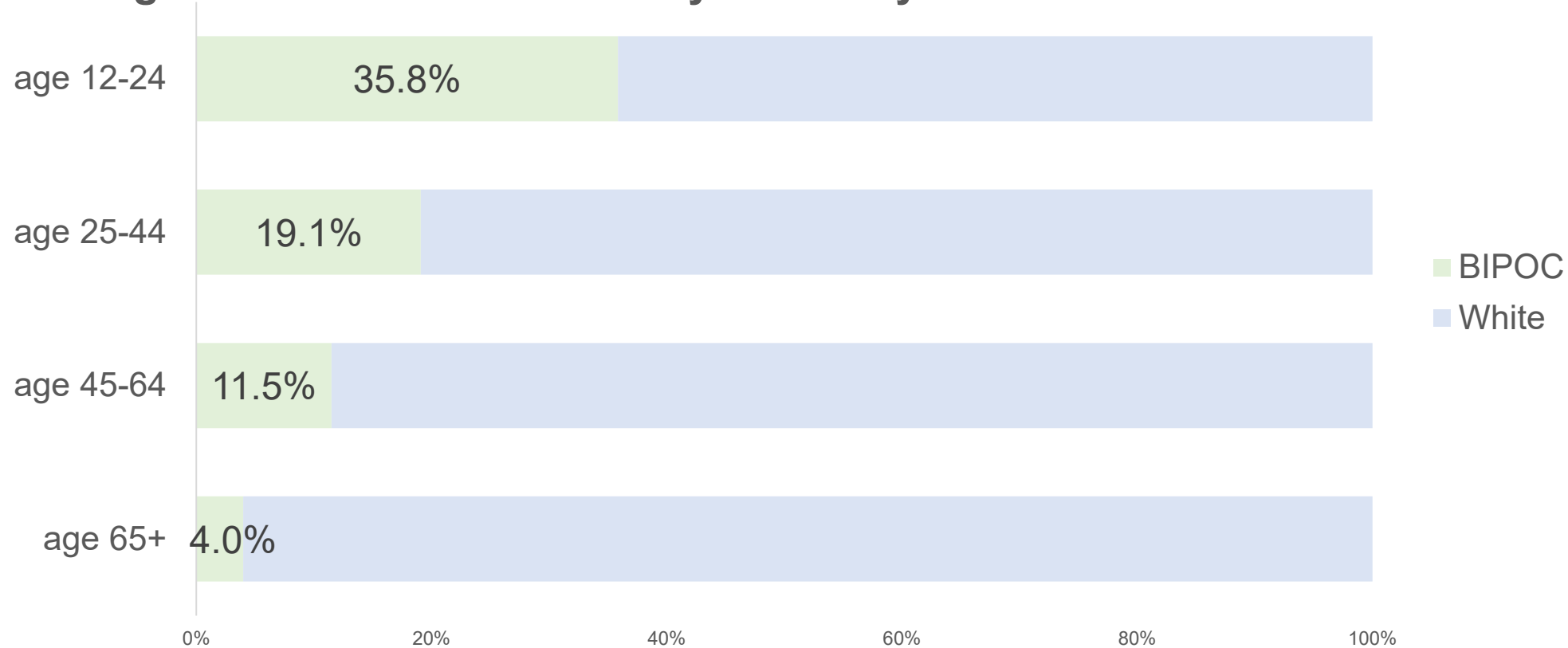


Figure 3: Percent visitors who are BIPOC and white, by age group. Source: Metropolitan Council 2021 Parks & Trails Visitor Study.



# Implementing agencies reflections: Demographics & equity

## Strategies

- Programming piece is key.
- Trail use can be a way to experience nature.
- Make more of direct connection between parks and schools. (Reconnect after pandemic closures)
- Diversify staff to be representative of the region's population. How can the Council support this work, nurture pipeline of BIPOC park professionals?
- Expand staffing for outreach.
- Regional parks policy plan can prioritize trails that connect underserved visitor communities

## Concerns/questions

- How to compete with other time commitments young people have?
- Are youth, BIPOC communities visiting local parks instead? How can we learn more?
- Transportation is needed to close the gap.
- How can the right recreational investments support visitation?
- What about children's experiences (under 12)? How do teens and young adults differ?



# Topic 4: Gender & disability





# Presence of disability among visitors

**11% of all groups include a person with a disability.**

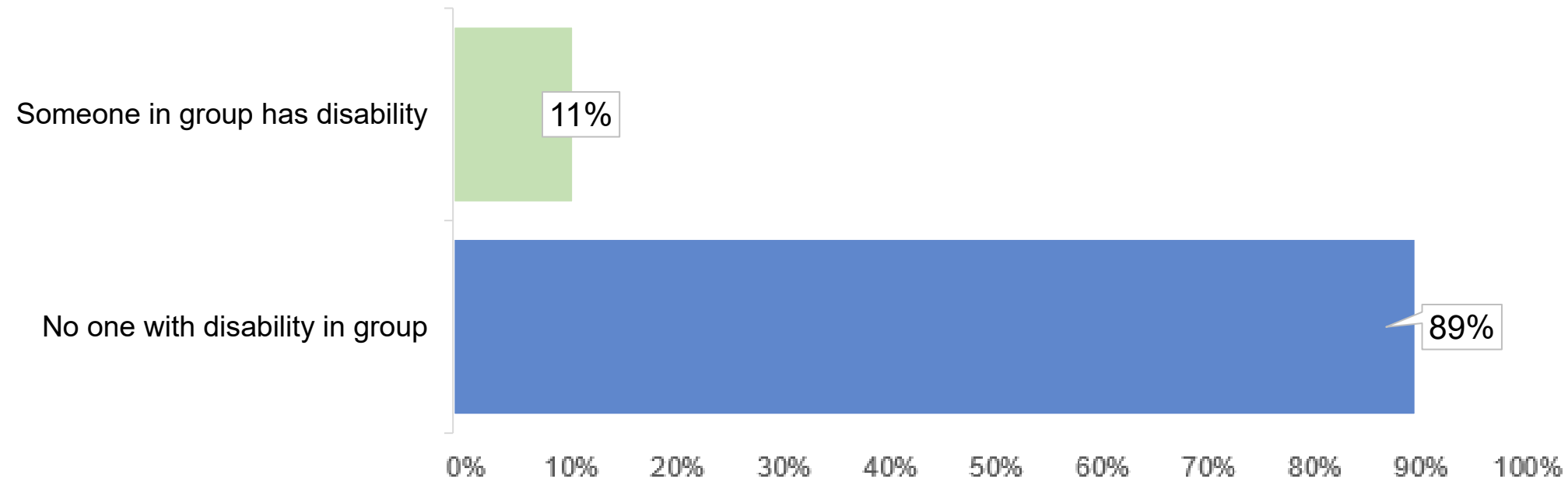


Figure 4: Groups visiting regional parks and trails that include a person with a disability of any kind (percent).  
Source: Metropolitan Council 2021 Parks & Trails Visitor Study.

# A relationship between age and presence of disability in group.

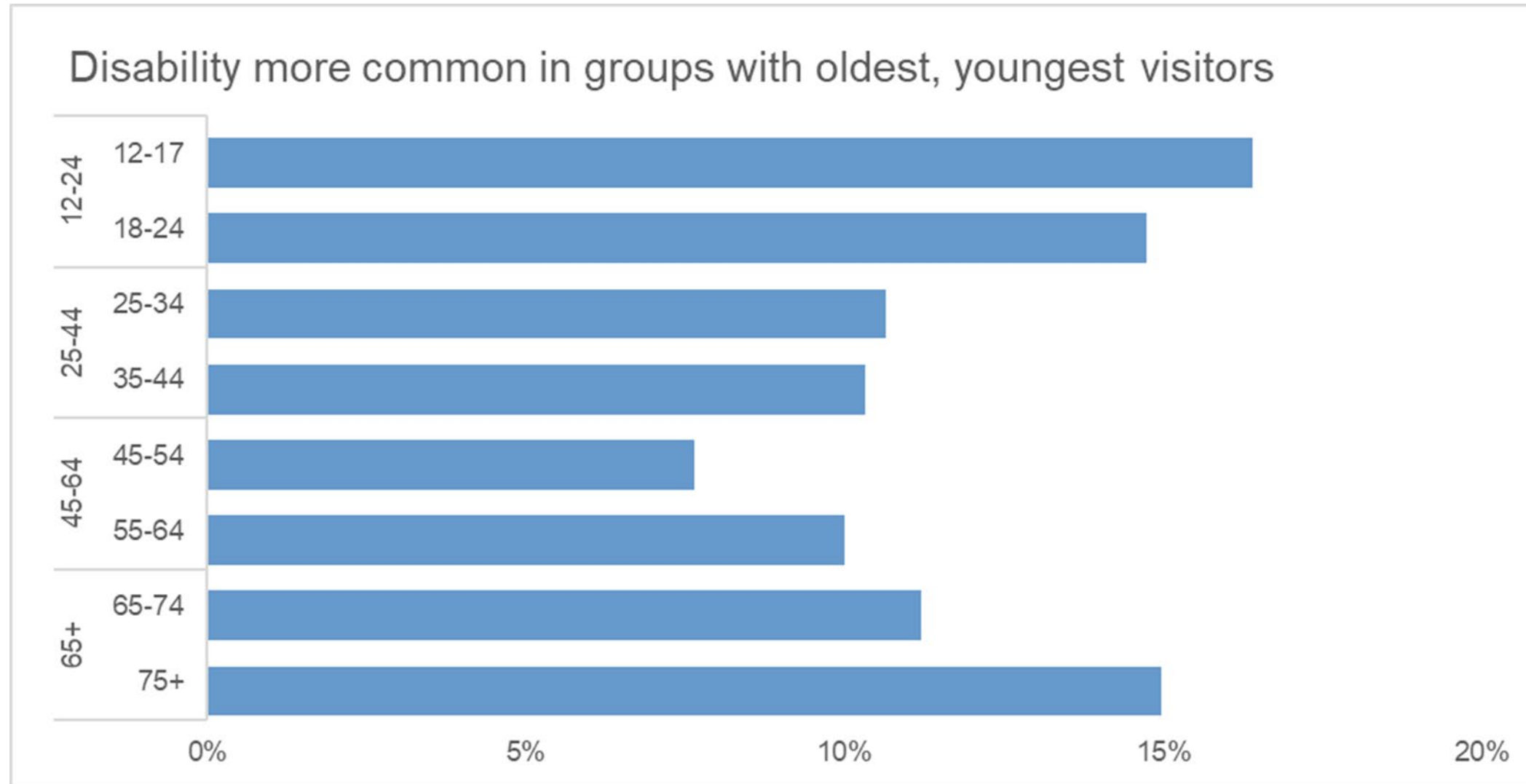


Figure 5: Proportion of groups in which a member has a disability.  
Source: Metropolitan Council 2021 Parks & Trails Visitor Study.



# Nonbinary and transgender visitors

Gender nonbinary visitors enjoy parks and trails throughout the system.

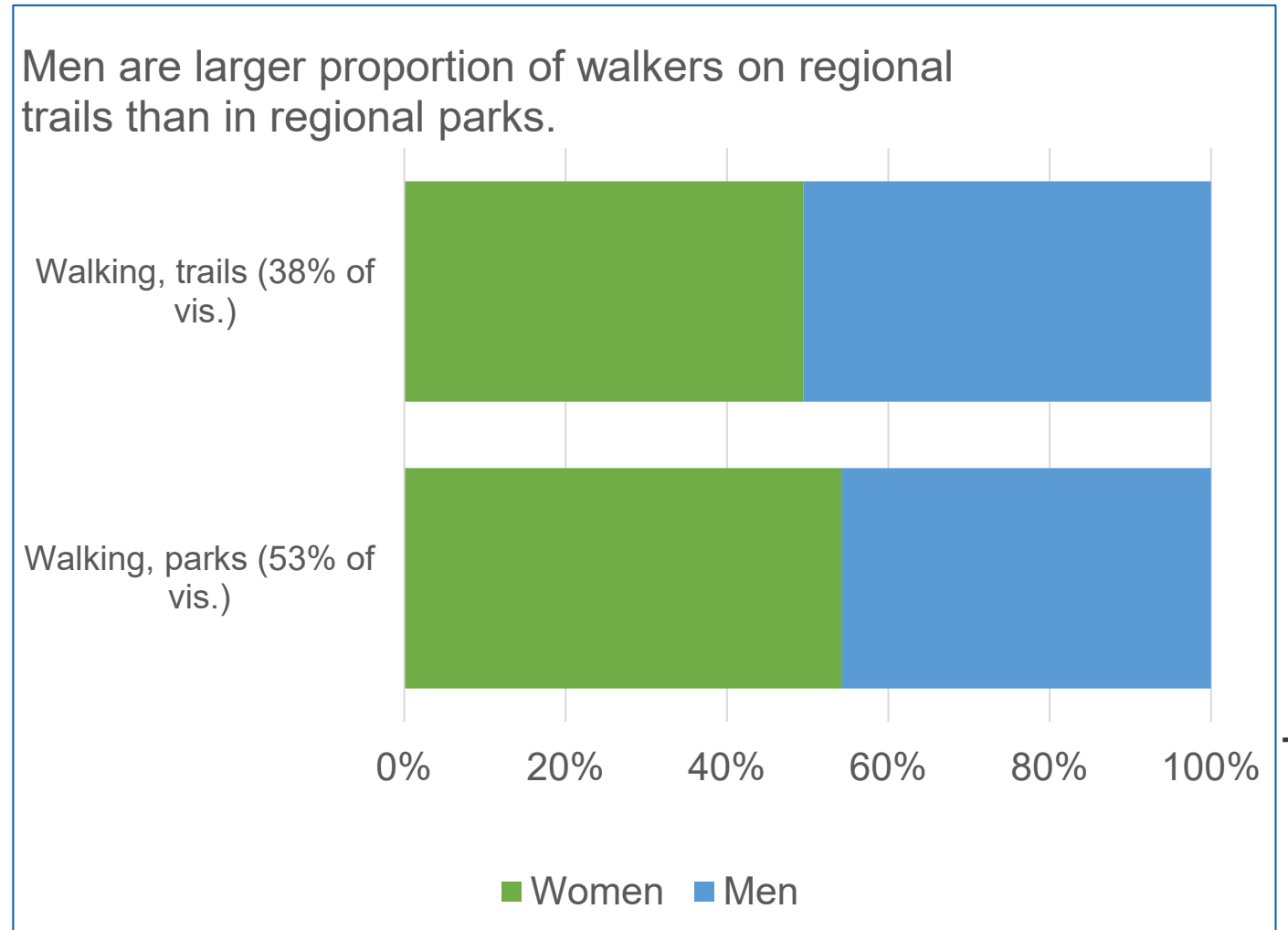
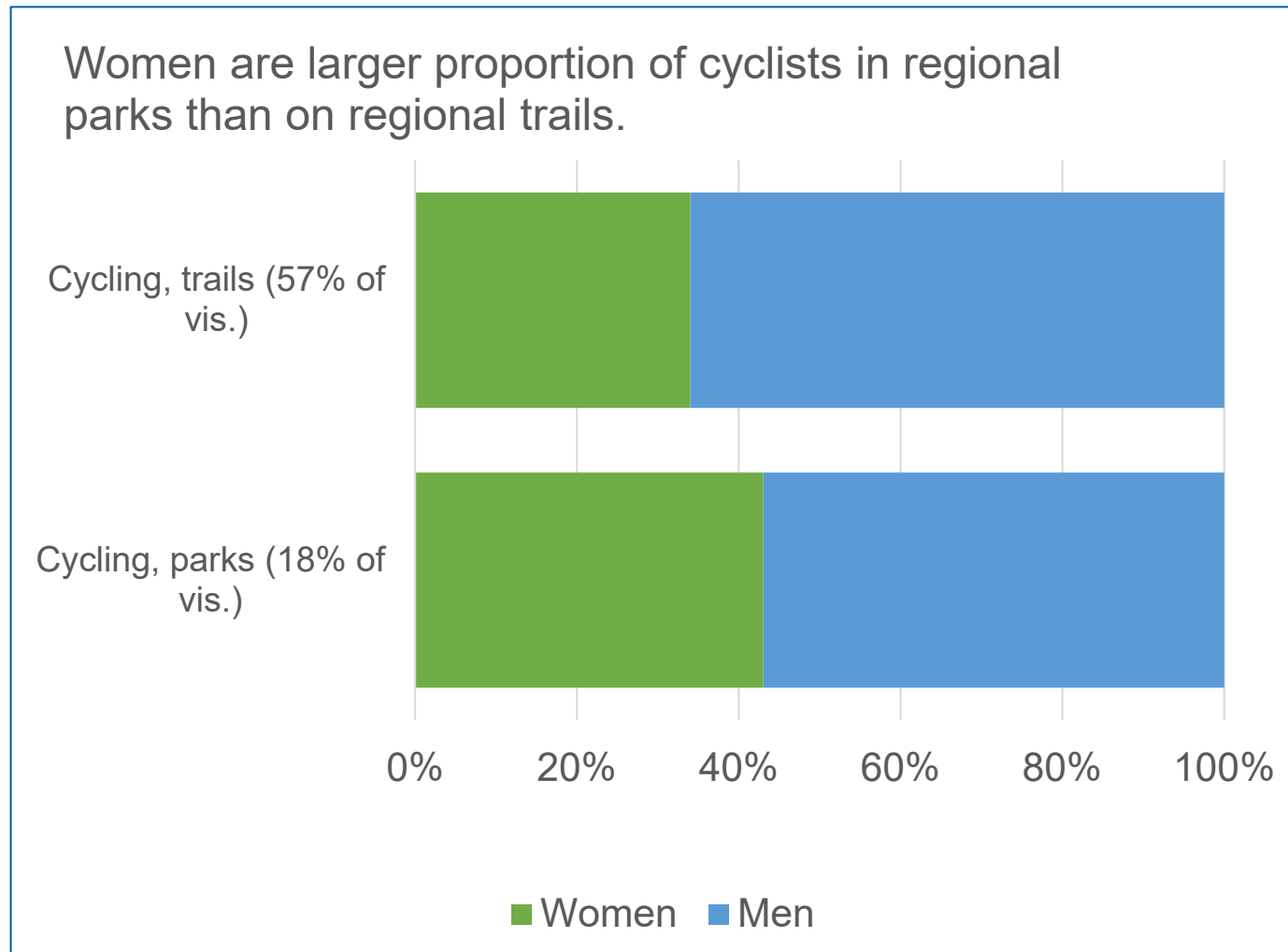
Gender nonbinary and transgender responses were slightly more than 1.5% of total.

Of these respondents, all age groups were represented, with the majority (53%) ages 12-34.

Respondents visited parks and trails in all ten implementing agencies.

*Figure 6: Information on gender non-binary and transgender visitors. Source: Metropolitan Council 2021 Parks & Trails Visitor Study.*

# Men's and women's participation in activities on parks vs trails.



Figures 7,8: Cycling and walking/hiking activities by gender compared between regional parks, regional trails (percent). *Source: Metropolitan Council 2021 Parks & Trails Visitor Study.*



# Implementing agencies' reflections: Disability & gender

## Strategies

- Policy discussion among implementing agencies about elements to make trails feel safer, including separating bikers from others, adding basic amenities to trails.
- Connect and consult with programming partners that support women and people with disability on trails.
- Provide amenities near trails that facilitate family visitation, safety.
- Bathroom facilities continue to be an important equity issue considering gender identity data.

## Additional research

- Learn more about women's visitation experiences on trails. Explore women's visitation in groups vs solo within Visitor Study data.
- Explore distance traveled – do women and men have different average distance traveled when visiting?
- Request the Council survey nonvisitors through general population survey of the region.
- Explore needed amenities and barriers for people with disabilities.

# Your analysis, comments, questions

## Discussion questions

- What are my reflections on Implementing Agency insights?
- How does the Regional Park and Trail system have influence to respond to these trends? What factors lie outside of our control? How should the Council respond to these trends?
- What else would I like to know?
- What are the implications for our work as Commissioners?





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