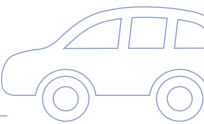


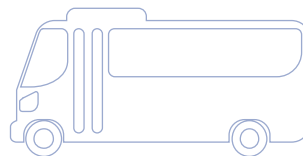


Transportation Needs In Daily Life Study



Final Report

December 2023





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Project Management Team

The Project Management Team (PMT) included staff from the Metropolitan Council and the Minnesota Department of Transportation. The PMT was responsible for project oversight including overall project direction and approvals of all deliverables.

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Community partners include people and organizations who helped coordinate focus groups.

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Eastern Carver County Schools - *Intercultural Liaison*

Emma B. Howe YMCA

Emma Norton Residence

Esperanza United

Hallie Q. Brown Community Center

University of Hamline Women's Resource Center

Hastings Family Service

Hopkins Activity Center

Korean Service Center

Lao Assistance Center

Minnesota Chinese Cultural Services Center

Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center

Pillsbury United Communities

Sabathani Community Center

The Salvation Army HOPE Harbor

Shakopee Community Assistance - *Staff Member*

Urban Roots

The Urban Village

Valley Friendship Club

Waconia Food Shelf

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Out of 184 people who participated in small group discussions, 81 requested to be credited in this report.

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Executive Summary

Transportation planning at the regional level is rooted in data and modeling. Large regional and national household travel surveys collect data on the general population to explain how many trips are made, where they start, where they end, and what purpose they serve. Equipped with this information, agencies build systemwide models that represent the population's revealed travel preferences. While this is the current status quo, household travel surveys can be enhanced by talking to people whose lived experience with the transportation system cannot be captured completely in a survey or an application.

However, for many individuals, the status quo is not working. Transportation systems in the United States have been built on a history of injustice and racial and economic segregation. Many communities have been left out of transportation planning conversations and priorities, and the transportation system as it exists today does not meet their needs. Survey data cannot tell us about the types of trips people are unable to make and the impact those missing trips—like missed medical appointments, lost job opportunities, deferred educational pursuits, and frayed social networks—have on their lives.

Agencies struggle to achieve adequate sample sizes to describe the general population, let alone understand nuanced within-group patterns for underrepresented groups, like Black people, Indigenous people, and

people of color, people with disabilities, and people with lower household incomes. Further, quantitative and survey data cannot give us a robust understanding of the underlying values, beliefs, preferences, and constraints that influence people's travel decisions.

One agency grappling with this data gap is the Metropolitan Council, the metropolitan planning organization for the Minneapolis-St. Paul region. They have been administering regular household travel surveys through their [Travel Behavior Inventory](#) program since 1970. In recent years, the program has increased in frequency and incorporated smartphone, GPS data collection that monitors travel over longer durations than the traditional 24-hour paper travel diary.

For the 2018–2019 household survey, the Met Council took three key actions to improve representation among historically underrepresented populations:

1. Oversampling groups that are historically underrepresented in surveys (e.g., the Census) to increase participation,
2. Outreach to underrepresented groups to encourage participation, and
3. Reminders to encourage full completion of the survey.

The [2019 Travel Behavior Inventory Household Survey](#) studied travel patterns, including mode share, geographic distribution, reasons for travel, and time traveled. Surveys were available in English, Spanish, Karen, Oromo, Somali, and Hmong. In total, 7,837 households participated in the survey. The summary findings highlighted several vulnerabilities that impacted the travel choices of those surveyed, like physical disability, age, and gender, though the “why” for these differences is not entirely clear from the data.

Other regional planning initiatives have incorporated public engagement, including targeted outreach to historically underrepresented groups. However, the structure of these campaigns is often oriented around a specific policy or plan, so the feedback can be narrow. Respondents may indicate their preferences for funding or travel choices, but they lack the opportunity to shed light on the bigger picture of what travel means in their day-to-day lives.

In an attempt to understand the multifaceted qualitative factors that shape people’s travel experience and to leverage that understanding in planning and policy, the Met Council commissioned the Transportation Needs in Daily Life study. The study hosted 32 small group discussions across the metro with 184 people to:

1. Understand how people’s values and needs influence their daily travel decisions
2. Incorporate people’s lived experiences into regional policy documents and planning initiatives; and
3. Ensure regional transportation resources support those who need them the most.



A note on quotations: Quotations throughout the document are edited for length and clarity. Also, we strive to be as clear as possible when identifying the speaker; however, for privacy reasons, the project team did not link demographic information collected in a post discussion survey directly to individuals within focus groups. As a result, we typically identify the speaker based on the focus group’s organizing identities. For more information on focus group organizing identities, see the **Methodology** section in the **Appendix**.



This research project is not unprecedented—the Met Council previously completed an equity-forward, engagement-style qualitative research study on youth access to and use of the regional park system. This style of research, which blends public outreach and engagement strategies with qualitative research methodologies, was successful in reaching diverse and underrepresented audiences and yielding actionable information for the agency.

As Met Council representatives, we, the study team, acknowledge that we hold power in spaces that can impact what people are willing or able to share. A few participants shared their skepticism directly about this and other government processes:

Can I ask you a question? Why are you asking about our identity? How are you going to use this question? So, once they find out all that information, are they going to make changes? I appreciate you telling me that, but I’m going to be honest. I feel like even telling my story and sharing my reality, nothing’s going to come of it. I hope we are actually being heard, not being overlooked. If you are going across the whole 7 counties, they’re going to focus on the suburbs.

Focus group for Native American women,
Hennepin County

Even with potential hesitations, we are in awe at the openness shown by all 184 participants from around the region. Their willingness to share their personal stories has created a deeper understanding of the regional transportation system and, more broadly, for how to work better with our communities. We recognize that we must, in turn, share their stories in the most true and meaningful ways we can while making the feedback actionable. To do this, we summarize both impactful stories and ideas shared by many people and provide unfiltered quotes that highlight the findings.

This report discusses key findings from small group discussions, also known as “focus groups”, where participants with a common identity shared their sentiments. These findings are categorized based on the [working objectives](#) of the region’s [2050 Transportation Policy Plan](#) and include recommendations for transportation policy.

If I wasn't here, I probably never would be telling anyone my opinions on this sort of thing, since you don't really think, like you're just one person, and I'm not going to reach the government. I think focus groups like these are super cool, because everyone has opinions, and everyone can tell you their experiences and their opinions. I think this is a perfect way. I don't even know how else I could get my experiences and opinions out there.

Focus group for Asian Youth,
Ramsey County

Connection to the Regional Transportation Policy Plan: *The 2050 Transportation Policy Plan, once adopted, will serve as a long-term transportation plan that outlines the region’s vision, values, and goals for transportation. The transportation policy recommendations from this study will be taken into account when updating the Transportation Policy Plan.*

The table on the following page summarizes the study’s findings and recommendations for the 2050 Transportation Policy Plan, sorted by objectives. The findings are the key takeaways from the small group discussions, and the transportation policy recommendations suggest policies that could resolve the transportation issues identified during the discussions. The Findings and Transportation Policy Recommendation section starting on page 7 provides more details.



Topic	Findings	Transportation Policy Recommendation
Our Region is Equitable and Inclusive (p. 9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People’s intersecting identities impact how they travel. • People’s experiences with violence shape how and when they choose to travel, especially for Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color. • Women of color often experience fear and trauma when traveling. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support vulnerable groups of people with their transportation needs. • Repair and eliminate impacts, harms, and injustices to Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color.
Our Communities are Healthy and Safe (p.14)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health shapes transportation needs, and transportation impacts health. • Fear for one’s safety and security while traveling is a defining feature of how people make travel choices. • Traffic safety is a looming concern and people want to feel safer in and around cars. • Many people experience anxiety while driving—especially in faster driving conditions like freeways. • The stressors of paying for transportation and isolation due to a lack of reliable transportation options affect people’s mental health. • Perceptions and fears for safety and security while traveling is communally shared and a defining feature of how people make travel choices. • Concerns about personal security are especially poignant for people who use transit for trips. • People’s fears about violence while traveling includes fearing police officers, especially when using transit. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address people’s feelings about transportation safety by making travel more comfortable and more welcoming on all forms of transportation. • Decrease death and injuries on all forms of transportation. • Take measures to improve comfort of travelers. • Invest in community liaisons with training in cultural competency and violence prevention to staff public transit. • Better define what behaviors are acceptable on transit in culturally competent ways. • Increase education around how to ride public transit.
Our Region is Dynamic and Resilient (p. 21)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost plays a large role in determining travel behavior. • Time spent in transport and waiting on transportation both take a toll on travelers and influence travel decisions. • Travel behaviors change over lifetimes, especially as people age. • ‘Transit dependent’ and ‘transit reliant’ are imprecise labels for many people who do not have reliable transportation in the region. • Environmental risks like weather, icy roads and sidewalks, poor pavement quality, lack of bike lanes, lack of bus shelter, or geographically spaced out transit stops shape people’s experiences while in transport. • Travel behaviors change in the winter. • Vehicle ownership and driving are difficult for many people. • People want transit to be responsive to their collective identity. • Transit is not meeting the daily needs for many who rely on it. • People’s relationships with their professional drivers/operators (including transit and ride-hailing) are important factors in transportation satisfaction and feelings of safety while traveling. • Construction detours are confusing. • Suburban transportation needs differ from urban needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer affordable travel options with fewer barriers. • Support transportation options, especially in suburban and exurban areas. • Prioritize snow and ice clearance on walking routes, including at crossings where snow tends to pile up. • Improve the waiting experience for transit by improving stop and station design. • Clean transit stops, stations, buses, and trains more frequently. • Prioritize timeliness of buses. • Improve seating on buses and trains. • Provide transit schedule information in more languages. • Improve dial-a-ride services. • Provide subsidies for ride-hailing services in areas where dependable transit services are lacking. • Provide additional driver training for transit operators, including customer service skills. • Improve the delivery of construction information to reach a broader audience.
We Lead on Addressing Climate Change (p. 34)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many individuals would prefer environmentally-friendly alternatives that can match the affordability and effectiveness of conventional transportation methods. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in sustainable travel infrastructure.
We Protect and Restore Natural Systems (p. 35)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People’s basic transportation, health, and economic needs must be met in order to have the resources needed (time, energy, etc.) to value, protect, or enjoy natural areas and green spaces. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in transportation leading to natural areas and green spaces.

A background image showing a group of people sitting around a table in a meeting or workshop. They are looking at documents and talking. The image is overlaid with a blue gradient.

Introduction

The Met Council organized the Transportation Needs in Daily Life Study to understand why and how residents in the region travel in their daily lives. The study team collected stories from residents in the region using focus groups where people were asked about who they are and how that impacts their travel decisions. The stories collected will supplement the Travel Behavior Inventory household survey travel data to help inform decisions about regional transportation policies.

Gaps in the Transportation Work

There are two fundamental gaps in the transportation field that this project aimed to address:

1. Research efforts to date have not accurately captured how people make daily transportation decisions.
2. Regional policies have not provided historically underrepresented communities with equitable opportunities for feedback in transportation decisions. Historically underrepresented people include Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color, people living with disabilities, and low-income populations.

To understand how people make decisions about their daily transportation—especially historically underrepresented communities—the study team talked to 184 people at 29 focus groups across the region. They focused specifically on historically underrepresented groups because of the limited opportunities they have been provided in the past, and the surplus of societal burdens they have carried, both in the transportation system and elsewhere.

The study team worked with community partners who represent target social identities to coordinate participants for discussions and help identify convenient locations and times that worked best for their communities. Facilitators encouraged stories about people’s experiences traveling in the region through open-ended questions relating to their identities and how that impacts transportation. For a full description of the study’s methodology, see the Literature Review and Methodology.

Goals

The goal of the study is to understand how our region’s transportation systems—roads, bridges, buses, trains, sidewalks, bikeways—work for the people who live here. By identifying and understanding the kinds of barriers people face in getting to places and accessing what they need, the Met Council can plan for a more equitable and responsive system. Specifically, the goals are to:

- Understand how people’s values and needs influence their daily travel decisions.
- Incorporate people’s lived experiences into the region’s Transportation Policy Plan and transportation projects in communities across the region.
- Ensure regional transportation resources support those who need them most.

Acknowledging Bias

Like all research, our identities frame how we interpret information. We recognize that a majority of our study team is white, in a society that systemically values whiteness over other representations like Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color. These benefits extend to other socioeconomic statuses and, by extension, our experiences with daily travel. We recognize the limits of our own biases in telling these stories but also contend that these biases do not invalidate the findings of the study. We have done our best to account for these biases and retell the participants’ stories.

In this study where we try to capture how people’s many identities influence their travel choices, labeling a person or groups of people as a single identity can be problematic. We acknowledge how labeling groups of people can run the risk of being reductionist. Although we use identity labels throughout this document, we seek to dig deeper in these focus groups and explore how one’s intersecting identities contribute to their transportation experiences.



Findings and Transportation Policy Recommendations

Findings are patterns seen across focus groups, or impactful feedback discussed by many participants who share a common identity. There are two types of findings:

1. **Established findings** that provide further evidence for widely accepted insights in transportation.
2. **New findings** that are not well documented elsewhere either in transportation policy practice or research, to our knowledge.

The findings are organized based on the working objectives of region 2050 Transportation Policy Plan, and include recommendations for transportation policy. The Transportation Policy Plan is the region's long-range transportation plan that describes the region's vision, values, and goals for transportation. Transportation policy recommendations from this study will be considered as part of the Transportation Policy Plan update.

Our Region is Equitable and Inclusive

“Racial inequities and injustices experienced by historically marginalized communities have been eliminated; and all residents and newcomers feel welcome, included, and empowered.”

Findings

People’s intersecting identities impact how they travel.

People are complex and do not make decisions based solely on their gender, race, or income status alone. Instead, there are many factors relating to who people are that determine whether they will take a trip, and by what means they will take that trip. Take the below example: an Asian woman from Anoka County traveled to see her older parents during the COVID-19 pandemic because of her responsibilities as a daughter, as a caregiver, and as part of an Asian family. It was the combination of these intersecting identities that resulted in the need to take her parents to parks for recreational trips.

We don’t go far due to language barrier, and if something happens we don’t know how to call police or tell someone what happened. Where we go depends on who’s going with us, we can’t go everywhere we want due to language barrier. Also identify as senior and Muslim, there are some places we don’t feel comfortable.

Focus group for Oromo older adults,
Hennepin County

There were a lot of Asian people that were targeted during COVID. My parents were stuck in the house and totally didn’t want to go anywhere. I would have to encourage [my parents] and say we’re going to the park we always go to, there’s not that many people, but my dad is always very alert. He wants to go where people can see us. It’s sad that they felt they couldn’t go and enjoy their walk. That’s where I come in as a caregiver and say ok let’s go, I’m here. My mom tells me I drive like an old lady. I drive like nothing else bothers me, I’m just focused. I don’t ever feel not safe driving.

Focus group for caregivers,
Anoka County

People’s experiences with violence shape how and when they choose to travel, especially for Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color.

Participants shared stories of witnessing or experiencing violence on transit or while they were walking, which discouraged them from taking transit or walking in the future. Even people’s experiences with verbal or physical violence unrelated to transportation influenced their travel choices; they may seek out modes of transportation they perceive as safer, as they often feel that they are on “high alert” frequently while they are traveling. These stories arose more often in focus groups with Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color or those experiencing housing insecurity.

I hear a lot of people in the Black community say they won’t put their children on the buses. They call Ubers or whatever to get the children to school, they don’t even want to put them on the school bus, a lot of people. Because of the gang violence, the drugs, the unknowing, feeling like we feel! Anything could happen. We might not make it back home. That one stands out a lot to me.

Follow-up focus group, multiple counties

*Sometimes I’m very isolated [i.e., vulnerable] because I’m Hispanic. We get scared because we get attacked for being Hispanic. We are hit for being Hispanic. I feel like it isn’t safe. **Just because someone looks Hispanic, people want to rob them, hit them, humiliate them, mistreat them. So, a lot of people are afraid to use public transportation for the fear of being attacked.** Because of so many things that have happened these days, these years, everything that happened with a certain person. I feel like it would scare them.*

Focus group for Latino caregivers, Ramsey County

Women of color often experience fear and trauma when traveling.

When asked about their experiences with traveling, women of color including Black, Indigenous, Asian, and Latina women, shared their heightened fears of personal security and trauma when traveling. They specifically mentioned feeling unsafe while walking or taking public transportation near individuals who pose a threat to their safety, especially men.

I can't get to doctor's appointments at the clinic by Walmart. I didn't make my appointment, because well I'll be damned if I was going to walk my ass, excuse my language, walk myself up to Walmart when it's, you know, 13 below zero with wind chill, yeah no, I'm not going to do that. I'll just reschedule my appointment and that's what I ended up doing.

Focus group for Native American women,
Ramsey County

I guess just being a woman and visibly queer makes it much harder to travel on the bus or train. Because you can be subject to lots of harassment. At night you should not be on the train because of creepy people. Particularly this one night on the train I was in the back, against the wall, these two guys got on. The older guy was beating the younger guy up. I looked around for the number to call or text, but I couldn't see it.

Focus group for Asian youth,
Ramsey County

Government agencies use exclusionary engagement practices and need to expand target audiences and how they reach them.

During public processes, many individuals expressed their concerns about the challenges they face while participating in them. They emphasized the need for government agencies to improve their methods of reaching out to people, by using approaches that are effective and accessible to them. Many stressed the importance of using culturally competent strategies to understand the community, including having agency representatives who are familiar with the culture and language of the people they serve. Unfortunately, many individuals feel that their voices are not being heard, and that they are unable to influence the processes that affect their communities.

I don't feel like I have influence. I would like for them to keep in mind the variety of cultures, seniors with disabilities need to be considered first.

Focus group for Lao adults, Hennepin County

I don't know if they're already doing this but a good way to make decisions is to know the community, to know the people and what they need, I guess, and how they go about their daily lives so you can make it more efficient for the people that use it most.

Focus group for Asian youth, Ramsey County

Policy Recommendations

Support vulnerable groups of people with their transportation needs.

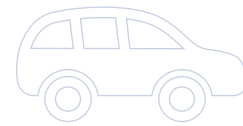
Several participants identified a connection between social factors, transportation, and quality of life. They requested support for helping unhoused people get driver's licenses to improve access to jobs and services, as well as help with substance abuse issues so that fewer would use buses and light rail cars for shelter. Several participants who used light rail were those from vulnerable groups: unhoused people who have disabilities, LGBTQIA+ people, and older adults. The prevalence of underrepresented people who depend on light rail speaks to an urgent need for improved personal security and comfort for people taking trains, as they must take light rail to make important trips, like shopping and medical appointments.

Repair and eliminate impacts, harms, and injustices to Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color.

Black people, Indigenous people and people of color face more safety issues while traveling because of historically discriminatory attitude, policies, and practices embedded in society. To improve safety and reduce violence, societal impacts, harms, and injustices must be addressed. Historically, transportation planners and elected officials have caused or exacerbated harms to Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color through police violence, property destruction or seizure, eviction, segregation, and more. Future transportation efforts must be centered in reparations-based investment. Redressing these past and ongoing harms in transportation-adjacent sectors (e.g., housing, land use, policing, etc.) is also necessary.

Strive for better engagement approaches and outcomes.

Many people have expressed difficulty in providing feedback in ways that work for them. It is imperative that agencies continue to improve their engagement processes to make them more convenient, culturally competent, and to use plain language. This will not only help to get feedback but also to build better relationships.



Our Communities are Healthy and Safe

“All our region’s residents live healthy, productive, and rewarding lives with a sense of security, dignity, and wellbeing.”

Findings

Health shapes transportation needs, and transportation impacts health.

Participants discussed the challenges they face in reaching medical appointments, particularly if they do not drive or do not have someone to drive them. Physical limitations make it hard to travel, and people with disabilities face even greater obstacles due to limited transportation options. Dependence on others for travel exacerbates these difficulties. Transportation also has a significant impact on health, including crashes, asthma, anxiety, and access to care. These challenges create a self-reinforcing cycle that can be difficult to break. At the same time, while access to the healthcare is important, many also spoke about the importance of movement and access to social connections and natural areas as critical to their health.

If friends are making, like, afternoon/evening plans and someone’s a little bit further away, it’s like, well, let me check how long it’s gonna take me to get there.

Or it’s like, if it’s 45 minutes, that doesn’t quite feel worth it. I don’t really want to be out after dark for a 45-minute bus ride, you know? So, I would say yes, it has prevented me at times.

Focus group for women experiencing housing insecurity,
Ramsey County

I have some medical problems and I cannot walk for that long, so I have to have a car for transportation to the doctor, groceries, church, I have to have a car. I have two growing children, thank God they’re not little but my son isn’t easy when you have to keep asking for rides. I don’t want to be a burden on friends or family. It’s expensive to not have a car, I don’t know what I would do to get far away. I’m on social security, my money would disappear in transportation.

Focus group for people without reliable transportation,
Scott County

Fear for one's safety and security while traveling is a defining feature of how people make travel choices.

People talked about many levels of safety, from perceived safety issues that impacted comfort, to direct physical or mental harm as a result of an unsafe setting while traveling. The types and levels of safety varied by mode of transportation, but the overwhelming request was to make travel safer.

Yea it's too darned fast. Because hardly anyone drives the speed limit meaning people are doing sometimes even 55. It's crazy. I don't feel safe, and I am not even driving.

Focus group for older adults,
Dakota County

The thing I worry about is getting hit when I walk because I know by Mackenthun's on the road by the bank and the Dollar Tree it's a really hard cross. Sometimes drivers are really scary, they want to whip through, right across from Evergreen on Olive Street, that's hard to cross for people like me, they don't stop. You have to wait until you see no more traffic.

Focus group for people without reliable transportation,
Carver County

Traffic safety is a looming concern and people want to feel safer in and around cars.

Although many drivers said cars feel safe, some expressed feeling unsafe due to others poor driving behaviors and the speed of traffic. Many walkers and bikers said it feels dangerous to be around cars as well.

A few of my friends knew the Somali girls that were killed [in the car crash on Lake Street in Minneapolis]. It's another level when it's someone you know. You never know the next day if it will be you. We take that into account when we're driving far into the cities. I don't like to go past Cedar.

Focus group for Somali people, Carver County

I still bike everywhere in the summer, and then I feel like it's kinda unsafe, because I always bike on the sidewalk and not the bike lane because it doesn't look safe. Because there was a lot of times where I almost got hit.

Focus group for Asian youth,
Ramsey County

New Finding

Many people experience anxiety while driving—especially in faster driving conditions like freeways.

Anxiety around driving, especially on highways, stopped people from going where they needed or wanted or reduced their activity space. People talked about high speeds and other drivers' poor driving behaviors as problematic. Fear of being struck while walking or biking stopped people from using these modes or allowing their children to walk or bike as well.

I'm content with just being at home. I would like to catch a bus to go downtown to Target and see the new Dayton. But I would go visit my daughter and go to bingo if I had a car. But I would not want to drive to bingo because I'm fearful of road rage, freeways are crowded.

Focus group for Lao adults, Hennepin County

[I have] high anxiety as a woman driving a car alone. It's hard for me to leave the house [with all] the buildup. When I'm driving a car that's not safe, especially between here and Cologne, there's no place (to pull over) if you break down with the semis coming.

Focus group for people without reliable transportation, Carver County

New Finding

The stressors of paying for transportation and isolation due to a lack of reliable transportation options affect people's mental health.

The extent to which people's mental health is impacted by transportation varies greatly from person-to-person, but many people discussed how stressful it is to find or pay for transportation. Several talked about how they've become isolated due to a lack of transportation options.

They need some kind of transportation in Scott County. I don't have to go every day, but I've been there, and I know a lot of people face difficulty in transportation. It's a sort of isolation.

Focus group for people without reliable transportation, Scott County

I see this in every story, I have heard it many times you are so limited to what you can do, and in the winter times people just stay home they don't go anywhere. It really impacts people's mental health, being stuck there.

Focus group for Latino caregivers, Ramsey County

Perceptions and fears for safety and security while traveling is communally shared and a defining feature of how people make travel choices.

Traveling can be a daunting experience for some people due to concerns about their safety and security. It can result in constant vigilance about one's surroundings, worry about the decisions and options loved ones make when traveling, and even lead to isolation and unmet travel needs when safety and security fears prevent people from traveling altogether. People's concerns about safety are based in part on stories or other people's experiences. People especially talked about perceptions of fear when using the light rail or the bus. There should be more safety measures so that people aren't afraid to ride the city buses. They're dangerous. I think they just [beat] a trans woman on the Lake Street platform, not too long ago. She was just trying to get some transportation. It's just crazy out here. The whole world is just nuts. I think they should have a little more safety.

I feel like as women, we live with that every day, despite any transportation method we use. You're just situationally aware, like this [expletive] is coming up right behind me or, you know, he's following me, or are they following me? I don't want nobody knowing where I live. I'll even go different way, I'll go around the block, like is he still following me?

Focus group for women experiencing housing insecurity, Ramsey County

We get scared because we get attacked for being Hispanic. We are hit for being Hispanic. I feel like it isn't safe. Just because someone looks Hispanic, people want to rob them, hit them, humiliate them, mistreat them. So a lot of people are afraid to use public transportation for the fear of being attacked. Because of so many things that have happened these days, these years, everything that happened with a certain person. I feel like it would scare them.

Focus group for older Black adults, Hennepin County

Concerns about personal security are especially poignant for people who use transit for trips.

Concerns about personal security is an established finding in transportation research, but this study highlights how strong and prevalent these concerns are. Findings from the focus groups tell stories of frequent violence among passengers and from police officers who patrol the light rail system, especially within historically underrepresented populations—experiences that negatively shape people’s perception of transit and their willingness to use it as a form of transportation. There were many and varied opinions about the best way to improve safety outcomes on buses and light rail. Some people felt that greater police presence could help the problem, but more appeared to believe the opposite; instead, there is more interest in a transit ambassador on the trains and buses to ensure passenger safety.

I would say it depends on the time of day because if it’s super late at night, and I’m on one side of the Twin Cities and need to get to the other I’ll just take an Uber, which is unfortunate because it costs more. And also, if it’s cold, like weather wise, because people want to get warm. There are a lot of people who don’t have homes, don’t have a place to go to, and the train is a warm place they can be, a place they can go to for quite a long time.

*If I were in their position, hey, it’s a warm train, I would probably be there too. **Unfortunately, some of the people also have mental illnesses and other things going on in their lives, so they won’t necessarily safely get on the train, and that makes me feel unsafe.** And then there’s the fact that when you’re at the train station, there’s no checking, no turnstiles or anything at the stops.*

Focus group for Black adults, Hennepin County

The hardest thing is just seeing the negative on the train. Recently, there were people sitting there with needles, one person even had a pistol. Then again, if I’m on the bus, I do get there quicker.

Focus group for Native American women, Hennepin County

*It’s also important to consider the fact that certain behaviors may be normal for others that it may be hard to change, and not all behaviors based on culture they grew up may not necessarily be threatening. For example, Somali people tend to talk loudly and make eye contact, people think we’re being aggressive but that’s just how we are. **Being able to read people, having that sense of others, shared set of norms that you can expect to see from people, understanding based on diverse backgrounds.***

Follow-up focus group, multiple counties

People’s fears about violence while traveling includes fearing police officers, especially when using transit.

Some people have reported problematic interactions with police while traveling on buses or trains. Black and Native people were among some of the most likely participants to express anxiety or fear around police interactions on transit. Some said they try to avoid interacting with police and may tailor travel plans accordingly. For those who have limited options, interactions with the police can lead to uncomfortable or unsafe situations. According to one participant, their student community was targeted by police with excessive fare inspections and citations, which is an early step in the “school-to-prison pipeline,” policing practices that unfairly target young people, resulting in a disproportionate impact on their lives. Another person described a violent incident in which she was pulled off a train by transit police.

*“[I want] law enforcement to be more understanding and communicative, don’t jump straight to ticketing. We talk about this. When we come out of school cops are always by the train station, they know we lose our ID or bus pass and they take that seriously, to a point where even people end up getting tickets/ in court and have to do community service or in juvenile detention. **If we ride for free it doesn’t affect the city budget so for them to use that as a prison pipeline especially when students are coming out of school. That has been our focus for years now.**”*

Focus group for African youth, Hennepin County

*I’m always wondering, how come the train doesn’t have a route for unsheltered relatives. Has a place to warm up and has resources. With security guards, hopefully they are trained with BIPOC folks, we need someone who looks like us. I’ve traveled to New York, and they have security and I thought that was really cool and I’ve wondered if they have a courtesy for unsheltered folks. There’s a trauma when you see a cop. **Unless you hire people from the community. You can’t be having anybody.***

Focus group for Native American women, Hennepin County

Policy Recommendations

Address people's feelings about transportation safety by making travel more comfortable and more welcoming on all forms of transportation.

When it comes to transportation, people value safety and comfort. They prefer modes of transportation that make them feel welcome and secure. Walking, biking, and taking the bus or light rail, are often perceived as unsafe and unwelcoming – especially when combined with the layered effects of social identity and discrimination.

Decrease death and injuries on all forms of transportation.

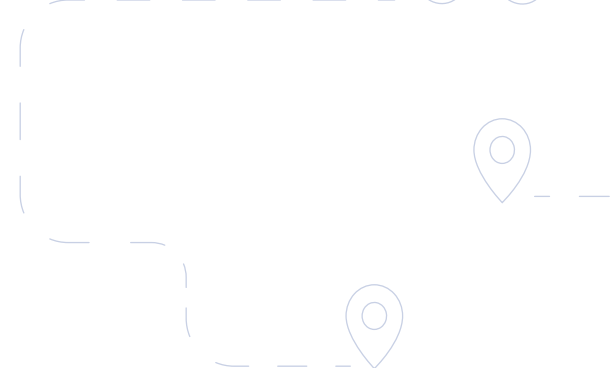
It is crucial to enhance the safety of all modes of travel and reduce the likelihood of crashes leading to injuries or fatalities. A single incident of harm or death can significantly influence public perception of travel, leading to changes in travel patterns and preferences. Such incidents are often widely shared, and can have a significant impact on how people perceive the safety of different modes of transportation.

Take measures to improve comfort of travelers.

Improvements such as better lighting and clearer signage would enhance travel comfort as well as safety and navigation.

Invest in community liaisons with training in cultural competency and violence prevention to staff public transit.

While specifics differed among respondents, there was a widespread request for government interventions to increase personal security while walking to and taking transit. Although there was no consensus on the solution, the underlying values indicated a need for welcoming faces on transit to help guide people and reinforce the code of conduct without alienating customers. At the same time, there was an acknowledgment by many Black, brown, and housing insecure participants that police officers can racially profile and abuse people. This finding is one of the many ways the project could improve health outcomes for residents in the region.



Better define what behaviors are acceptable on transit in culturally competent ways.

Travel safety is paramount. The key is to minimize the likelihood of fatalities or injuries, regardless of the mode of transportation. A single incident can have a significant impact on people’s travel choices and perceptions of safety. This is because incidents are often widely shared and can alter people’s perspectives on how and where they travel.

Better define what behaviors are acceptable on transit in culturally competent ways.

Education around riding best practices could help alleviate fears around using transit more often. Education could introduce riders to transit best practices or tools while riding transit.

Our Region is Dynamic and Resilient

“Our region meets the opportunities and challenges faced by our communities and the economy including issues of choice, accessibility, and affordability.”

Findings

Cost plays a large role in determining travel behavior.

When transportation safety, cost, and efficiency are at odds with one another, people have unmet needs—either they cannot make necessary or desired travel, or they endure conditions that do not feel safe. There were a wide range of affordability concerns from all costs associated with personal vehicles including buying a car and paying for gas, parking, and insurance, all the way to

As someone that’s currently unemployed, I would like to see more public transit opportunities in our community as I struggle having to pay for gas and have reliable access to a car I can consistently use. I would also love to see more transit from Chaska to Normandale or Chaska to Metro Areas.

Focus group for Somali adults, Carver County

being able to afford a bus ticket. People also talked about cost in non-monetary terms: when people must patch together transportation from friends and family, they must ration and “spend” social capital on the most urgent transport needs (e.g., medical) and may not be able to participate in important but less urgent activities (e.g., social connection).

*We are new to the country. For people in that situation, it is difficult because when you arrive you don't have the means to buy a vehicle. **You don't have access to credit because you need to have a job, and to have a job you need to have mobility.***

Focus group for Latino caregivers, Ramsey County

Time spent in transport and waiting on transportation both take a toll on travelers and influence travel decisions.

There are additional burdens for people who do not own a car, people who are reliant on others or transit for travel, caregivers, people with disabilities, and older adults. Some participants expressed that consolidating transit routes into a limited stop or express routes causes hardships for people who live between the remaining stops.

*I have a problem with the buses not connecting in a small amount of time. **I have a 30–60-minute wait for the bus and I would like to see that rectified.** Bus drivers say we can't get off where we want, they don't tell you they're making a detour, they take you five blocks out of your way. Detours, having to go out of the way from where you're going is so distanced.*

Focus group for Lao adults, Hennepin County

*This morning on my commute to work I got a phone call from my daughter, and she was crying because Metro Mobility was not there yet, and they were 40 minutes late. My husband found out somehow that they were en route, so we were able to tell her then that they were coming but **the whole experience with the anxiety and the waiting is just too much.***

Focus group for caregivers to young people with disabilities, Washington County

Travel behaviors change over lifetimes, especially as people age.

Many participants travel behaviors changed as they aged. They switched primary modes as they got older and their health worsened, especially moving away from driving themselves to relying on others for rides for relying on transit.

[Getting to] the grocery store [is an issue]. I have pain in my hips, I'm 72 and I have to go to the grocery store so I say well I'm not that far from Hy Vee let's see what I could carry. Every one step I took I had to stand or wait because it hurt so bad. 8 blocks from my house. The most crucial thing was to get groceries and my son was not available and I have nobody. It was the most terrible thing for me. I cannot go anywhere, not to church or anywhere.

Focus group for people without reliable transportation,
Scott County

*For the riders that I have, a lot of them are elderly and their spouse can't drive so they have to get ride through Family Service. The other thing with elderly people is they need helps sometimes. When I'm giving rides, **sometimes I need to give them a hand for them to hold onto from them to get into the building, or push the wheelchair, or help them with their walker.** So they need more than just the ride and they might need some assistance also.*

Focus group for people without reliable transportation,
Dakota County

‘Transit dependent’ and ‘transit reliant’ are imprecise labels for many people who do not have reliable transportation in the region.

Participants in the focus groups organized for people who rely on transit shared the complex web of services and modes they used, including rides from friends and family, walking and biking, and ride services—as well as transit. Referring to these people as ‘transit dependent’ reduces their support network and overemphasizes one piece of the puzzle at the expense of the others. For some people, what we might call ‘transit dependent’ or ‘transit reliant’ reflects a position of ‘transportation disadvantage’. For others, they use transit frequently and it largely meets their needs, so deficit-focused language inappropriately positions the car above other modes as optimal. Not driving or relying on a private auto may reflect transportation disadvantages for some but isn’t a universal guarantee of unmet needs. These layers are complex, and further discussion is needed to decide whether and how to shift the language we use to describe people who use transit primarily or exclusively and/or who experience transportation disadvantages. For the purposes of this study, we use ‘people without reliable transportation’ to be more expressive of the stories we heard.

We have lived here 22 years. It is also difficult for us to transport ourselves because there is no bus. Right now, I work in Hugo and my son is the one bringing me and picking me up. Sometimes he says, ‘Why me again?’ I say, ‘Well, you’re the driver.’

Focus group for Latino caregivers, Ramsey County

I only get \$203/month and \$281 for food stamps. So that’s all I have. And I have to make those dollars stretch so whatever I can do on foot I do. I don’t want to waste money going place to place if I don’t have it.

Focus group for people without reliable transportation, Carver County

Environmental risks like weather, icy roads and sidewalks, poor pavement quality, lack of bike lanes, lack of bus shelter, or geographically spaced out transit stops shape people's experiences while in transport.

Weather-related risks also constrained people's options and decisions. Snowplows clear the roads for driving while blocking corners for people walking, rolling, or trying to access the bus, and icy or snow-covered sidewalks increase the risk of falling. Extreme heat and extreme cold alike created danger for people if their modes of travel left them exposed to the elements. One person found themselves trying to choose between staying on the bus and facing an unsafe passenger or getting off the bus to have to wait 45 minutes in sub-zero temperatures for the next one. While perceptions of safety influencing travel behavior are not new findings in themselves, this work collectively indicates the immense toll that safety- and security-related concerns have on those who are traveling. In addition to the general stress caused by these fears, people often must make painful trade offs to meet their daily needs, creating current pain and often opportunities for future pain.

*I feel like the consequences are so intense if people fall on the ice at night. I've fallen on the ice at night and wondered if I could even get up. It means peoples lives are severely limited if they're unable to get to the bus. **Intensity of consequence needs to be emphasized. It's not just about 'oh you fall', it's like, 'you fall and might not recover.'***

Follow-up focus group, *multiple counties*

*[Bus shelters] With heaters and lights! So many places don't have lights. They stripped the wires out of it so there's no streetlights. **It's all black in a very scary area.** I think they need to have them at the actual bus stop that can't be tampered with by homeless people. Especially when it's below zero in the middle of nowhere, you're freezing.*

Focus group for women experiencing housing insecurity, Ramsey County

Travel behaviors change in the winter.

Travel behaviors change due to cold weather, ice, and snow. Residents are less likely to travel—using all modes—due to discomfort in the cold or fear of falling/crashing on ice/snow. Walking is especially difficult for people who have to navigate over large snowbanks and traverse icy sidewalks and crossings.

*In the winter, it's ridiculous to me that there isn't snow removal at the corners. That is absurd to me that **to take the bus people have to climb over three feet of snow and ice.** It's the largest impediment, I think, for people in Minnesota taking the bus in the winter. I don't understand why the bus entrances and exits aren't tended to. There just needs to be a budget to clear the snow so people can enter and exit safely.*

Focus group for people Black adults,
Ramsey County

*We have dialysis patients who need to go [to the Twin Cities] 3 days/week. **When they're stuck in a snowstorm south of town and can't make it in, it's life or death.** We've had some terrible snowstorms. Cities can salt and sand more, there's not the blowing that occurs. It's been a struggle this winter getting people in the farm fields into town for their life-saving appointments.*

Focus group for people
without reliable transportation,
Dakota County

Vehicle ownership and driving are difficult for many people.

Many stated that owning a car and being able to drive would be the easiest way to get around, but that it is not possible to do so for one or more reasons:

1. Many people with mental or physical disabilities cannot drive.
2. All people under 16 are unable to drive.
3. Many older adults said that they can no longer drive themselves due to health-related changes that happened as a result of aging. In addition, several younger adults acknowledged they may not be able to drive as they get older.
4. Many people who do not have reliable transportation are the same people who do not have consistent access to a car due to the cost of car ownership.
5. Some people actively avoid driving due to anxiety.

I've got a crappy car that's about to break down. I drive my car but I'm afraid. My son comes over, he lives in Anoka. He takes me to get groceries once per week because my car's really bad. I drove it here. I live on the edge.

Focus group for people without reliable transportation,
Carver County

Previously, I didn't drive. I had panic attacks, okay? I would [get stressed] in my shoulders and my head. After three years, I started driving but I wouldn't drive far because I crashed on the freeway. But after five years, I took a course in Maplewood Mall. I would think to myself 'How am I going to get to work? How am I going to get to work?' This was an enormous stress for me. Truly. The truth is that I was losing sleep [over it]."

Focus group for Latino caregivers,
Ramsey County

People want transit to be responsive to their collective identity.

People want transit options, even people who do not regularly use transit brought up transit service frequently. Transit was the most-discussed mode of transportation by participants, both by people who use it as a primary mode of transportation and by others who had stories about their time taking transit. Transit's high rate of discussion may have occurred for several reasons: the sponsor of this study, the Met Council, provides transit services in the region, the focus of this study on underrepresented communities may have more people who take transit, or people may have more memorable experiences on transit than other types of travel. In any case, although the facilitators did not specifically ask about transit, it was brought up. Many said they want transit to be an easy option for their communities.

*Metro transit and buses are cheaper than Uber/Lyft so I take them more often. **Sometimes my card is expired so if Metro transit could have an extension I would like that.***

Focus group for Somali adults, Hennepin County

Bombard the city with buses and trains, make people get stuck in traffic in cars for events. People from the suburbs should see buses on the road to encourage them to park and ride to events. Create an instant app to track and tell the bus driver to wait, and contact them. It's discouraging to not know. Have languages broadcast on the trains. The bus drivers should be well trained. They're really helpful and can make it fun with music. .

Focus group for Lao adults, Hennepin County

Transit is not meeting the daily needs for many who rely on it.

Schedule unreliability had economic and social costs for riders; missing a bus meant being disciplined at work, missing an entire religious service, or being scolded by peers. The types and degree of concerns varied based on the transit type. For fixed route, infrequent or nonexistent service left people stranded or made travel difficult or impossible. For dial-a-ride, participants shared stories about waiting for hours for dial-a-ride services to show up—to the extent that the entire activity or errand was missed due to arriving too late or the scheduled return trip happening too soon after the late arrival.

Making appointments can be really difficult due to the large pick-up windows, since if you're late to too many appointments you can be taken off the schedule, even if it is completely out of your control due to Metro Mobility being late.

Focus group for caregivers to young people with disabilities,
Washington County

For improvements I want to see buses stick to their schedules, arrive and leave on time. I had one experience where the bus left early and people miss the bus. Frequent bus and train service.

Focus group for Lao older adults,
Hennepin County

People’s relationships with their professional drivers/operators (including transit and ride-hailing) are important factors in transportation satisfaction and feelings of safety while traveling.

Driver relationships can either reinforce or undermine people’s sense of dignity and connection to the system and community. This is especially true for people who rely on drivers to get around, like people with disabilities (and their caregivers) and older adults. These groups of people reported negative or stigmatizing behavior from drivers more often since they also rely on them more often.

Whenever I take the bus or railway, I smile or wave to people and the driver, and they smile and wave back. It’s a very kind and comfortable feeling.

Focus group for Korean adults,
Hennepin County

Construction detours are confusing.

Several people expressed frustration with the lack of advanced notification and clear signage during construction-related detours.

*My biggest problem was construction and safety from drivers. Construction because I tend to be in habits. **Construction closed my exit on 94 and the detour was very slow. Felt like an hour just to get to 94 to go home.***

Focus group for Lao older adults,
Hennepin County

*“We definitely need to retain people to have compassion and patience. Definitely have something in town that is personal and affordable for everybody. I wanted to cuss for a second but had to stop myself. **Be patient with vulnerable adults, children, people, just be kind. You don’t know what kind of day people are having.** Dispatchers give [my child who has a disability] attitude.”*

Focus group for people without reliable transportation,
Dakota County

*[W]hen there’s a lot of construction and I’m just unsure, like, where the **detour is or what roads are closed, or even if a road is open or not.** I mean they have signs, but sometimes it’s just confusing, I would like, I just choose to go past it or find a different way.*

Focus group for Asian youth,
Ramsey County

Policy Recommendations

Offer affordable travel options with fewer barriers.

People want more affordable, high-quality transportation options across the board. People, in particular, struggle with paying for personal vehicles and dial-a-ride services.

Support transportation options, especially in suburban and exurban areas.

People use multiple ways of getting around and their mode preferences change depending on context. Mode choices also change as people age, as evidenced by many participants' descriptions of how they used to travel at an earlier point in their life. There were many requests from people who do not have access to reliable transportation options to have more options other than driving, especially those in non-urban areas.

Prioritize snow and ice clearance on walking routes, including at crossings where snow tends to pile up.

Many people talked about walking being difficult in the winter, especially people without reliable transportation or with disabilities. Prioritizing clearance on walking paths would help everyone walk safer in the winter but especially some of the most vulnerable populations like older adults and people who have disabilities. Participants recommended a municipal snow clearing system that would target transit shelters. Snow and ice removal, especially at intersections and transit stops, came up repeatedly.

Improve the waiting experience for transit by improving stop and station design.

Many participants talked about discomfort waiting for buses due to darkness or feelings of insecurity. For bus stops, many—especially those with physical disabilities—commented on how difficult it is to take transit in the winter due to snow and ice buildup at bus stops.



Clean transit stops, stations, buses, and trains more frequently.

Many people cited the uncleanliness of transit as a health risk, so they requested more frequent cleanings of buses, trains, bus stops, and train stations.

Prioritize timeliness of buses.

There were many requests for improving participants' experiences on the bus, including from people who do not regularly take the bus. There were many requests for shorter headways, increased frequency, expansion of service, and reliability in both urban and suburban areas between neighborhoods and schools—all of which may be conflicting requests given finite resources. Similarly, some recommended connecting existing services to private services, like ride-hailing services. Several participants spoke about the need for bus routes to connect to one another to limit walking between bus transfers.

Improve seating on buses and trains.

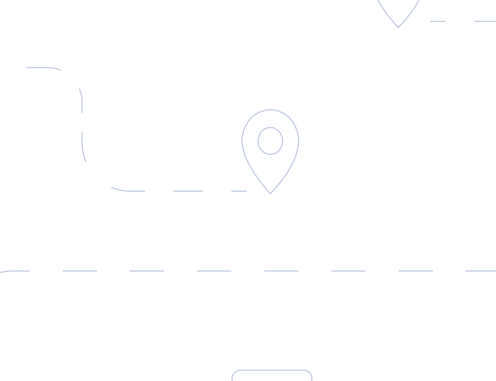
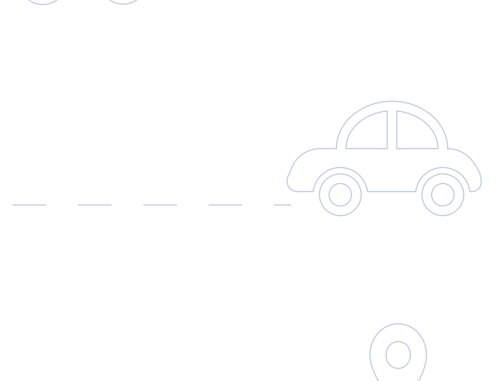
Additional seating was requested to accommodate body diversity, while some people wanted better air conditioning during warm weather.

Provide transit schedule information in more languages.

Several requested schedule information in languages other than English.

Improve dial-a-ride services.

People requested several service upgrades to dial-a-ride services, including Metro Mobility, DARTS, and other services. Participants requested assistance for older adults and children with disabilities, possibly in the form of a trained assistant on each vehicle in the



fleet. Parents of children who use Metro Mobility noted that there is a need for better location tracking and communication with parents whose children take these services (re: route changes, cancellations, delays, etc.), as well as increased frequency of service to schools.

Provide subsidies for ride-hailing services in areas where dependable transit services are lacking.

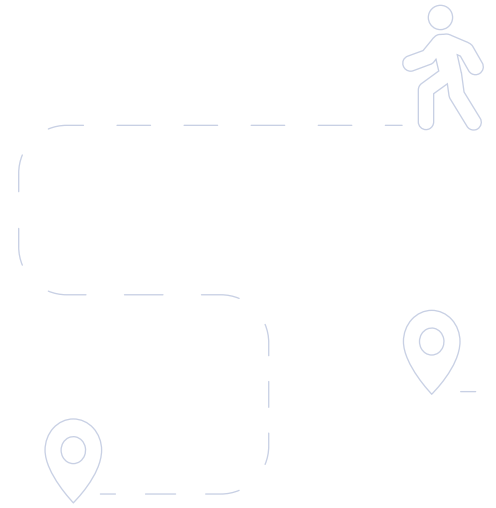
Subsidies for ride-hailing services could help fill transportation gaps in areas without reliable transit services.

Provide additional driver training for transit operators, including customer service skills.

Many people recommended additional training for operators who work with older adults, younger people, and people with disabilities to improve riders' comfort and accessibility. Lots of comments related to the shortness of interactions with customers who have questions about the service or where to get off. They requested that dial-a-ride drivers who work with kids with disabilities receive training on the inter-relational needs of these children to ensure their comfortable travel. Several people criticized bus operators for leaving early or passing them by at stops and then having to wait for the next bus.

Improve the delivery of construction information to reach a broader audience.

Improve construction information, both in terms of delivery and quality, to prevent confusion around construction work zones and closures.



We Lead on Addressing Climate Change

“We have mitigated greenhouse gas emissions and have adapted to ensure that our communities and systems are resilient to climate impacts.”

Findings

Many individuals would prefer environmentally-friendly alternatives that can match the affordability and effectiveness of conventional transportation methods.

Several participants said they would prefer to take more sustainable options if they were available and similar cost to less sustainable options. Some requested new walking infrastructure in suburban places, as well as better sidewalk maintenance. Several also requested investment in electric vehicle infrastructure, like charging stations.

You know how you go to school and talk about climate change: ‘oh we need to change our ways, drive less, bike more, walk more’. I was so pumped, I said I’m going to bike, ‘mom, I need a bike!’. I got myself a bike, I got on the bike, I’m like where am I going to bike? I can’t get anywhere with this bike. The roads are dangerous, I can’t go alone, I can’t get as far.

Focus group for Asian youth, Ramsey County

*I think if I had a car and was also making these like decisions to take public transportation, that would cross my mind a little bit more. Like, oh, I should be more socially conscious and take a greener source. **But because I don’t really have that option, I’m either going to bike or I’m going to take the bus, and either of those feel more environmentally conscious than driving.***

Focus group for young women, Ramsey County

Policy Recommendations

Invest in sustainable travel infrastructure.

People want sustainable transportation options that are affordable and effective. Ideas discussed at focus groups included walking and bicycling, e-bikes, transit, and electric vehicles. Several people also talked about sustainability in terms of land uses, noting that it is easier to get around in urban cores.

We Protect and Restore Natural Systems

“We protect, integrate, and restore natural systems to protect habitat and ensure a high quality of life for our region.”

Findings

People’s basic transportation, health, and economic needs must be met in order for them to have the resources needed (time, energy, etc.) to value, protect, or enjoy natural areas and green spaces.

Although important to several participants, parks and natural areas were not as seen as priorities on par with basic needs like accessing food or medical assistance. Several people talked about the importance of access to parks and in their daily lives. People in suburban or exurban areas indicated parks are the main places they go to walk or bike.

Because the park is a little bit away, I don’t let them walk to the park yet themselves, and I can’t see them and there’s one street that’s a little busier, but we bike there together.

Focus group for caregivers, Anoka County

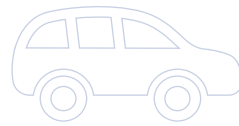
[W]hen there’s a lot of construction and I’m just unsure, like, where the detour is or what roads are closed, or even if a road is open or not. I mean they have signs, but sometimes it’s just confusing, I would like, I just choose to go past it or find a different way.

Focus group for Asian youth, Ramsey County

Policy Recommendations

Invest in transportation leading to natural areas and green spaces.

Invest in transportation leading to natural areas and green spaces. Some individuals rely on natural areas and green spaces for recreation and desire greater accessibility to those opportunities. Better access to natural areas and green spaces could improve health of residents and enhance the livability of communities.





Social Identities and Transportation Experience

This study organized focus groups around key factors associated with identity and travel behavior like life circumstances, race/ethnicity, geography, gender, and age to ensure broad inclusion of communities that exist in the metro region, and to foster safer environments for groups to share their transportation experiences openly. The [Review of Relevant Work](#) supports this approach—homogeneous groups can increase participant openness and willingness to share, especially around sensitive topics.

This section describes findings based on organizing identities and

how they experience transportation. Findings are not exhaustive since people have multiple intersecting identities, but rather aim to summarize identities used as organizing factors for focus groups. The Metropolitan Council and its partner agencies must intentionally and inclusively involve residents in policy-making efforts to improve regional transportation in the coming years.

All statistics in this section come from the 2021 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates unless otherwise noted. For more information on findings, see Findings by Topic in the Appendix.

People without Reliable Transportation

WHO THEY ARE

People who do not have dependable transportation.

KEY TOPICS

1. Many people cannot rely solely on transit to get around, especially those living in suburban communities.
2. Personal security concerns while traveling vary and are often related to peoples' circumstances.
3. People who rely on others for transportation have strained personal relationships, and some have relied on abusive relationships for rides.
4. Relationships with transit drivers are important in determining the quality of transportation on buses.
5. Relying on transit has significant costs in terms of dollars and time spent waiting.
6. Poor snow and ice maintenance is a barrier to travel, especially for pedestrians.

Number of focus groups where most or all participants do not have reliable transportation

11

No vehicle households in the region

7%

Counties where focus groups were held



Identities also represented in these focus groups

Asians, Black or African Americans, East Africans, white people, older adults, female, male, caregivers, people experiencing housing insecurity, people living with disabilities, youth

A note on identity stories: At the beginning of each identity's summary, there is a longform story from one participant that describes their transportation needs in detail. These stories were chosen to illustrate some shared sentiments among those with a common identity. Like other quotations throughout the document, these longer stories have been edited for length and clarity.

C's Story

C's story demonstrates the complex web of transportation decisions some people without reliable transportation make on a daily basis. C uses a mix of dial-a-ride services, ride-hailing services, and rides from family to make it to important destinations like medical appointments.

I've been living in Waconia for ten years starting in September. I don't drive so that's my big issue. And I have appointments in the cities and obviously can't walk there. So, my biggest issue is just some services not offered that I need. My Adult Rehabilitative Mental Health Services (ARMS) worker as well and my parents, they're the only two things I can count on. [That] won't last long.

I've only seen two people in town using Lyft and they never took my rides. Seems like everyone in this area has the same issues. Until the whole after 2:00 pm thing with Water's Edge [medical transport service]—I actually never had an issue using them for years—after 2:00 pm they do rides to dialysis only. With the Lyft deal, it seems like when I first started getting transport through insurance I didn't know about Water's Edge. A taxi came from the Cities and they take 45 minutes. They don't wait for you to bring you home [from your destination]. You have to call again. I waited for almost an hour and a half for a ride back home. I could have walked in that time had I known [it would take an hour and a half]. Reliable services aren't available right now.

SmartLink goes to the cities from here, but you have to go through other counties. If your ride doesn't line up with the times others are running, it doesn't matter. Reliability is the biggest issue. Even with smaller transportation groups you could put out a ride that nobody will take. I'll still have to wait and do something before a certain time. Companies prioritize more and it screws up everybody else. Non-priority transportation for a wider range of distances and cheaper prices [that] take insurance.

They used to have the city go around and clear [snow on the sidewalks] the first couple of years I was here. Now all of a sudden, they don't, the residents are held in charge which they

shouldn't be. That's an issue since a lot of the houses on the street...have been torn out so there's nobody to clear those anymore...In the summer I tell people I'd walk, if I tried doing that right now the paramedics would be bringing me water and air. My diabetes doesn't work too well, that's another danger and why I can't walk to where I need to go. When I was on the bike I would almost get hit.

Personal security concerns while traveling vary and are often related to peoples' circumstances.

People without reliable transportation shared a wide range of concerns about their transportation:

- Women often feel unsafe when traveling alone, in the evenings, when waiting at bus stops, or when walking.
- Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color shared experiences of racism while on transit.
- Older people mentioned their vulnerability while traveling including their concerns about falling on ice while making first- and last-mile connections.
- Non-native English speakers said they struggle to navigate the transit schedules and routes.
- Caregivers worry about their children's comfort and safety.
- People experiencing housing insecurity worry about harassment from other users and police officers.

These burdens seem to be compounded for people with multiple marginalized identities: many unhoused women, for example, shared stories of verbal or physical violence while traveling on the light rail, either from police officers, other patrons, or people they passed while walking to and from transit. In contrast, several men mentioned feeling safe on transit—this underscores the importance of listening to people with diverse perspectives.

*I think they should have more safety on the buses. I mean, not just that I'm handicapped, I ain't going to defend myself, but if you have, say **not even a police officer, but someone to keep the riff-raff from happening on the buses, because people are even afraid to ride the city buses.** There should be some kind of safety measures, more safety measures. There should be more safety measures so that people aren't afraid to ride the city buses. They're dangerous. I think they just killed a trans woman on the Lake Street platform, not too long ago. [Another participant] They beat her, they didn't kill her, but they beat her half to death. She was just trying to get some transportation. It's just crazy out here. The whole world is just nuts. I think they should have a little more safety.*

Focus group for Black older adults,
Hennepin County

Many people cannot rely solely on transit to get around, especially those living in suburban communities.

Some focus groups were originally designed with ‘transit-dependent’ as an organizing factor. However, it became apparent that many participants cannot depend on transit to meet their daily needs and, instead, use a mix of transportation modes to compensate for the unreliability of transit. When transit services are unreliable or entirely unavailable, people often make hard financial or social trade-offs, like taking long walks or bike rides, paying expensive ride-hailing services, relying on a friend or family member for a ride, using a personal vehicle that is unreliable and/or financially burdensome, or skipping trips altogether. This is especially true from participants in suburban focus groups. People living in the suburbs said they have long times and that, if you miss it, you must find other ways of making trips.

People who rely on others for transportation have strained personal relationships, and some have relied on abusive relationships for rides.

Participants described transportation strategies that exhaust a limited “budget” of social capital to ask friends for transportation assistance. If people have to rely on their friends for essential travel (e.g., medical appointments), they have no remaining capacity for discretionary, but still important, travel like social engagements and activities. Reliance on friends or acquaintances for essential travel leaves people without reliable transportation vulnerable to abuse or exploitation. These experiences are demeaning and painful, pointing to the social and personal costs of limited transportation.

I haven't been back on the bus since detours. I felt uncomfortable before since I have a lot of pain. And I don't call Metro Mobility either because they take you all out of the way. They went to Bloomington with me once when I just needed to go to the church. I want a car but the traffic on the freeway is terrible so I would not want to drive, there's people who weave in traffic... I would rather rely on another driver. If it's not in my 20-mile range I don't go.

Focus group for Lao adults,
Hennepin County

[O]ne neighbor: she has to ask for ride once in a while. The person who brings her asks for hugs that seem inappropriate. When you're so tied to asking and not able to get around in other ways, you feel like you have no choice, when it's between getting food vs inappropriate hug, it's terrible to be thinking about making those choices.

Focus group for people without
reliable transportation,
Dakota County

Relying on transit has significant costs in terms of dollars and time spent waiting.

For people living on a fixed or limited income, making transit trips and navigating transportation without a car creates a financial burden. Respondents shared stories of frequently being surprised by the costs of bus trips, and the extra cost can have tangible impacts on their weekly budgets, including travel and food choices. The extensive cost of transit is especially burdensome for people who use the various dial-a-ride services or private buses. These financial weights appear to frequently be placed on people who are vulnerable in other ways, including people with disabilities, Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color, and people with tight incomes. In addition to the financial costs, time costs for Metro Mobility and dial-a-ride service came up repeatedly as barriers to accessing everything from groceries to exercise/wellness activities to children’s schooling to medical care. Poor reliability on some services creates additional time costs, and these costs can be uncertain and unexpected.

When I was in my in-person assessment... He said ‘it’s \$4.’ I said, ‘Round trip?’ He said, ‘No, one way.’ I went, ‘Oh my goodness!’ So that was a real bummer. I was left with the issue, with the opportunity, okay, how am I gonna make this work with what I have? With being on a fixed income. I’m one of those people where I believe every problem has a solution. It’s something I had prayed for, and I finally got it. I decided I would prioritize my trips. When I put money on my card, I need to prioritize my trips. My needs. I probably won’t even be alive, but they need to bring that price down!

Focus group for women experiencing housing insecurity, Ramsey County

Poor snow and ice maintenance is a barrier to travel, especially for pedestrians.

Snow and ice on the ground prevented people from walking and biking, and made first- and last-mile connections more treacherous. Some participants noted that they limited their travel altogether during winter months to avoid long walks to bus stops in the snow, cold, and ice making it clear that there was a distinct seasonality to some people’s vulnerability.

The weather issue, certainly everyone on my block agrees absolutely with keeping the sidewalks clear. We’ve talked to the city and everything. Seems like there needs to be a broad coalition saying, ‘You got to make sure that in the wintertime it’s safe for people to walk.’

Follow-up focus group, multiple counties

Relationships with transit drivers are important in determining the quality of transportation on buses.

People shared varied experiences interacting with bus and dial-A-ride drivers, and these experiences notably colored how they viewed their entire trip and transit more generally. People who had positive interactions with drivers said that the personal touch made their trip feel more secure and enjoyable. Many respondents across different identities shared negative experiences with drivers, however. This included Metro Mobility, SmartLink, Smart Ride, DARTS, iHail and SW Prime. Caregivers of young people with disabilities noted that dial-a-ride drivers often did not interact well with their children, causing them distress and fear, older people experienced impatience from drivers, and people of color noted fears of or experiences with discrimination from drivers.

*Metro Mobility deals with people who have disabilities, who don't drive for whatever reason. Many of our people have intellectual disabilities, and anxieties, and physical mobility issues, but it's that intellectual part where you can't explain to them, you know 'we're going to go over here', and you know, they don't understand, and they're panicked. That's just unacceptable. I don't know what the solution is other than in a perfect world maybe they would have separate rides, [and drivers] who are trained in [working with customers with disabilities]. I don't know what the solution is. **To have somebody, who's in tears riding around on the bus not knowing where they are, trying to call their mom, to me is unacceptable.***

Focus group for caregivers to young people with disabilities,
Washington County

People Experiencing Housing Insecurity

WHO THEY ARE

People whose living situations are unstable.

KEY TOPICS

1. Many people experiencing housing insecurity either rely on the bus, light rail, or dial-a-ride service to get around, or do not have access to reliable transportation.
2. Personal safety is a huge concern for people experiencing housing insecurity, especially for people who use the light rail or walk at night.
3. Cost and ability play large roles in people's transportation choices.

Counties where focus groups were held



Number of focus groups where most or all participants were experiencing housing insecurity

2

Cost-burdened households in the region
(those who pay more than 30% of their income on housing)

27%

Identities also represented in these focus groups

Black or African American, white, females, males, people who depend on transit, people living with disabilities

J's Story

J, like others who experience housing insecurity, is forced to make tough decisions regarding which trips are necessary. This is due to a lack of transportation options and a limited budget. J uses a combination of dial-a-ride services, ride-hailing services, walking, and biking to get to important destinations with their son.

It is myself and my 9-year-old son. We actually have been technically homeless this last year. I am used to having my own place and a vehicle. I used public transportation in the past which had both good and bad experiences, both single and with my child. But I'm used to driving myself, this year I have not had a car, and being down the river there's no transportation options. It makes it extremely difficult to get him to appointments or to get grocery shopping even, just simple paths. We walk everywhere and with it being winter it's definitely difficult. So, I lived in St. Paul for that reason because at least we could jump on the bus or a train and get where we need to go, but down here you're in trouble because you do not have any options unless you want to pay for Smart Ride.

Right now, as far as transportation goes, nothing is going well me or my child... We have important things lined up to get housing. There are intake appointments for that that I can't get to. I can't get to probation meetings at the courthouse. There's important meetings that need to be met that I can't get to with the cold. Other times when it's nice, I can bike or walk. My son is right along with me, he loves it. But when it's cold like this, I have health issues and it makes it almost impossible to make it to appointments that aren't necessity appointments... [Hasting Family Service] has a lot of events. There is a lot that me and my son miss because of Transportation... So aside from just the medical thing, socially there's a lot that gets missed from lack of transportation. And there's also a lot of essential, non-medical, that get missed because of lack of transportation.

Many people experiencing housing insecurity either rely on the bus, light rail, or dial-a-ride service to get around, or do not have access to reliable transportation.

Reliable and affordable public transportation is an important option for many people, but not everyone has access to it. In many cases, people have to rely on a combination of various transportation modes available on any given day. They often turn to their family and friends for help to get to important places like medical appointments and grocery stores.

[In the last week] I've taken train, bus, and car. I've taken the train to the social security office to take care of my business. I've taken the bus to Walmart to get things that I needed, personal items, and I've taken the bus to my son's house. And my niece picked me up yesterday to take me to her house, just for a family gathering.

Focus group for women experiencing housing insecurity, Ramsey County

Cost and ability play large roles in people's transportation choices.

Many individuals experiencing housing insecurity struggle to reach their desired destinations due to disabilities or lack of affordable transportation. Those living with physical disabilities often find it challenging to get around independently, especially during the winter months when there is snow or ice on the ground. Some individuals wish they had access to their own vehicle but cannot afford one at the moment. Others prefer public transportation because it is more affordable.

The only thing is that it's difficult trying to carry groceries home on the bus, you know, trying to get the handicap seats for the people that need them. Those things are difficult, people won't give up the seat, especially when they don't have a place to sit anymore. Sometimes the transportation gets to be bothersome, but it's all we can afford really.

Focus group for people experiencing housing insecurity, Hennepin County

Personal safety is a huge concern for people experiencing housing insecurity, especially for people who use the light rail or walk at night.

A number of participants have expressed concerns regarding personal safety while traveling on the light rail or walking at night. People talked about fear traveling in and around others they were scared of and several participants shared stories about assaults they witnessed or experienced themselves. Women, in particular, emphasized the need to remain vigilant and aware of their surroundings at all times while traveling.

I rode the train yesterday...there was a guy he was rubbing up on this young girl's [expletive]. I was like, 'Did he just touch you when he went past you?' I was like, 'Oh my God, there's too much going on' He just stuck his hand up there and felt up her [expletive]! She said she didn't know; she didn't feel it. It's because she's scared, she said she didn't feel it. You can't go nowhere. I try to ride the bus everywhere I go, and I don't go anywhere without my pocketknife, because that was a damn near death experience. I'm always walking and going places by myself at night. I was a runaway. I want to be safe, I'm on alert. I gotta be safe out here, I'm by myself, I got my weapon. I'm always watching, call me a hawk.

Focus group for women experiencing housing insecurity,
Ramsey County

People Who Have a Disability

WHO THEY ARE

People who have a disability including movement, vision, hearing, mental, self-care, or independent living disabilities.

KEY TOPICS

1. People who have disabilities shared experiences related to a lack of access to destinations.
2. They often point to poor snow and ice maintenance in the winter, especially near bus stops.
3. Many shared that they avoid public transportation or have concerns about their health and safety when riding.
4. People with have disabilities value relationships with their drivers, and negative relationships make it hard to travel.
5. People who have disabilities criticized dial-a-ride services for their limited access, high cost, and sometimes unpleasant experiences.

Number of focus groups where most or all participants were living with a disability

5

People living with disabilities in the region

10%

Counties where focus groups were held



Identities also represented in these focus groups

Black or African Americans, East Africans, adults, older adults, females, males, caregivers, people who depend on transit, people experiencing housing insecurity

K's Story

K lives with a disability and illustrates the frustrations that many people living with disabilities encounter when traveling in the Twin Cities Metro. K often can't travel because of their disability.

I sit out and look and so many times, and so many days, and I look at the train and the bus drive by, and I remember when I was 19, when I was 20, when I was 21 and I used to have me and my three kids, they was babies...we'd just be walking and we'd be at the bus stop, and we'd get on the bus, the train wasn't here then. There wasn't no train going down the middle of that damn street and everything was so normal There wasn't that stuff going on then, there wasn't nobody hurting nobody, there wasn't no drugs, it was just people catching the bus to go where they needed to go. I was going to college, I was dropping off my kids at daycare, getting back on and going to college. It was not none of this friction and just nonsense, you know. But now, it's so different, and now I'm old and unable and I have things that I can't...I can't catch the bus no more. I can't ride this new train that I hardly even understand, even all these bad things about it. In a way, it's a good thing that I can't catch it, because I'm not a part of all these things. I'm hurting so bad because I'm not a part of...I can't get around like everyone else and go all these places. I feel like I just, I can't be free in that way. I just watch the ladies walk out the door and walk down the hill and they go places, and I can't do it. I can't go. I wanna go somewhere too. And it hurts sometimes, this is my first time crying about it. If it wasn't for the crime, maybe I wouldn't feel this way. Maybe I would take 30 or 40 minutes to walk down that hill and take my time. But why should I do that and get on that train when they smoking that [expletive]? What is it worth? It's not even worth it. I just need to do what I need to do to 'take care of myself, and my sons will come see me two to three times a month and I'll do my Metro Mobility and my medical cabs, you know.

People who have disabilities shared experiences related to a lack of access to destinations.

People with physical and mental disabilities, as well as older adults who are less able due to age, talked about the hassle of traveling without a personal vehicle, noting that they sometimes cannot make medical appointments or attend social gatherings. People shared that they use public transportation, including buses and trains, but are unable to access certain locations they want to travel to due to a lack of bus routes or limited available routes to their destination. This results in many of them choosing to stay home or only leaving for medical appointments, causing feelings of isolation and loneliness. One user shared that their disability allows them to drive their personal vehicle, but they still face poor treatment from others when using their handicap sign because their disability isn't visible.

*I can't go to work if it's not shoveled. I've had to call in a couple times. There's a bus that goes here, but they only shovel halfway through the hill. **Even though it's in front of Regions, I'm like, 'How is that even legal [to not shovel] because it's in front of the hospital?'***

Focus group for women experiencing housing insecurity, Ramsey County

They often point to poor snow and ice maintenance in the winter, especially near bus stops.

Many people have a difficult time being able to access their bus stop due to lack of snow maintenance on sidewalks and at their stop. Multiple people shared that even when snowplows clear an area, they are only partially cleared making it difficult or impossible to walk or roll to their stop. This has caused some people to try walking on the road/curb area to get to their bus stop which makes them feel unsafe next to moving traffic. Some users are unable to make it to work due to bus stops being inaccessible during the wintertime.

*I agree...the fact that in the wintertime, the **only thing they could do is shovel bus stops, because with me having a knee problem, I have to stand along the curb, and I don't like doing that.** I've seen cars that speed up like they want you to jump out of the way, and I'm like, 'Where am I going?' So, they could shovel.*

Focus group for people experiencing housing insecurity, Hennepin County

Many with disabilities shared that they avoid public transportation due to concerns about their health and safety when riding.

Some people feel uneasy riding the bus or other forms of public transportation due to open drug use or negative encounters with other riders. Some felt that they would be unable to remove themselves from the bus in case of an emergency, due to their disability. Others shared that they had concerns over smoking and drug use on the bus being detrimental to people with asthma and other health issues. One user shared that they have family members express concerns over safety when riding the bus, so they volunteer to run errands to prevent them from needing to use public transportation. Multiple users shared that their safety concerns stop them from getting to where they need to go.

People with have disabilities value relationships with their drivers, and negative relationships make it hard to travel.

Participants shared how important driver relationships are to them, and people with negative experiences tend to have anxiety about their trips. People had negative experiences with bus drivers not wanting to lower ramps, driving past them when they are using walkers or canes at the bus stop, and feeling rushed to sit down once they are on the bus. Other users shared appreciation and sympathy for the bus drivers and have had positive experiences with them accommodating their disability, making it easier to get on and off the bus.

*It's scary for an elderly person with all this activity. They got people at bus stops trying to rob old people. **Can't go to the hospital to see people because the buses are too crowded and people don't give me a seat. I have a lot of disabilities. Involuntary flare ups. Doctor doesn't care, it's embarrassing. I have bad knees too. I have no control of my involuntary movements. It's frustrating and I go to Rochester with no answers. People look at you like what's going on.***

Focus group for Lao adults,
Hennepin County

*Like I said, if you have money, any kind of money, they should let you get on the bus. **But some drivers don't even wait for you to sit down before they take off. Or they'll wait and say, 'hey Lady, sit down first and then we'll take off.'** But they do say 'hurry up' a lot too.*

Focus group for older
Black adults,
Hennepin County

People who have disabilities criticized dial-a-ride services for their limited access, high cost, and sometimes unpleasant experiences.

Out of the 84 mentions of ability from the focus groups, 31 were related to dial-a-ride services. Some participants expressed gratitude for the dial-a-ride service and its drivers, but others mentioned issues with timeliness, reliability, and negative interactions with drivers. Many participants with physical disabilities rely on the personal vehicles of friends and family members or ride-hail services, like Uber and Lyft, to travel. Multiple participants expressed that the cost of each ride is a financial burden; some people pay the cost even though it causes them stress while others do not use the services at all because they can't afford to. Users also shared that the Metro Mobility service is limiting due to only being able to carry on a certain amount of personal items.

I really don't like the Metro Mobility bus because they charge you and you only allowed to carry so much on the bus when they take you grocery shopping, stuff like that... You're only allowed to carry two bags grocery shopping. I have at least 7 or 8 bags, so it doesn't benefit me. And you pay \$2 to get on, \$2 to get off. But yeah, they charge, so that's why I don't use my Metro Mobility card, it doesn't make sense.

Focus group for older Black adults, Hennepin County

Caregivers

WHO THEY ARE

People who provide care to a dependent. A dependent is someone who relies on care from someone like a child, an older adult, or a person with a disability.

KEY TOPICS

1. Caregivers wish they had more reliable transportation for their families.
2. Caregivers want their dependents to have access to safe and comfortable transportation.
3. Transportation efficiency is a top concern for caregivers.
4. Caregivers rely on strong social networks to make transportation easier for their families.
5. Families sometimes can't enroll their children in enrichment activities due to a lack of viable transportation options.

Counties where focus groups were held



Number of focus groups where most or all participants were caregivers

6

Caregivers in the U.S.

16%*

**Caregiving in the U.S., AARP Family Caregiving and National Alliance for Caregiving*

Identities also represented in these focus groups

East Africans, Hispanic or Latinos, adults, older adults, females, people who depend on transit

L's Story

L describes the logistical struggles that many caregivers experience. L used to rely on the bus and walking but has more recently gotten a car to help with their caregiving duties.

I used to not drive, but sometimes there was a need for me to drive. And I was pregnant with my... third kid and I wasn't driving. So I'd bring out my other kids. One was 8 and one was 3 in the stroller, and I'm [then] pregnant. And my husband had three jobs... From where I lived I had to catch two buses to get to downtown Saint Paul... it was very cold and my kid was sleeping in his little stroller and the other one was scared because we were downtown and it was very cold. And on the bus, I [tried to carry on] the stroller like a burrito, with all my bags... and my kid was carrying other bags. And they [wouldn't let me on] two buses because I had too many bags and I was crying and had no cellphone. I was crying because the kids, like I said it was very cold, and I'm tired with the bags, with two in the stroller. Here, I got angry and came crying. And I got a car and left.

Caregivers wish they had more reliable transportation for their families.

Several caregivers who face challenges with reliable transportation have expressed how impactful it would be for their families if they had more dependable transportation options. The absence of reliable transportation options can result in stress and less-than-ideal choices for transportation, which can be unsafe or unreliable. This is particularly true for individuals who care for dependents with disabilities who need to rely on dial-a-ride services. Many caregivers of dependents with disabilities have reported that scheduling rides in a timely manner with dial-a-ride can be difficult.

*I passed [got passed by a bus] with my son. I didn't have a [driver's] license or anything. **On that day, my car broke down and my son had an exam. He had to go to school on his skateboard... and the snow was starting to fall.** I said to him 'Why in the name of god isn't there another one?'*

Focus group for Latino caregivers,
Ramsey County

Caregivers rely on strong social networks to make transportation easier for their families.

Some participants mentioned that they have chosen to reside in areas that are close to their friends and family, as it provides them with additional support for childcare and transportation. In addition, a few individuals have developed close relationships with their neighbors, which have proved to be beneficial for their families. These relationships have helped them with transportation, like providing childcare while the primary caregivers are away or offering rides for their children.

*We're very car reliant. My parents always watched our 3 kiddos, they never had to go to daycare, **when we were buying our house we made sure we were close to our parents.***

Focus group for caregivers,
Anoka County

Caregivers want their dependents to have access to safe and comfortable transportation.

Caregivers especially focused on the safety and comfort of their dependents when traveling. Many caregivers are apprehensive about their dependents driving in snowy conditions or using ride-hailing services like Lyft and Uber. They also prefer their dependents not to walk or ride bicycles on busy streets or travel alone on public transportation. Some caregivers have reported that their dependents using bus or light rail have had uncomfortable or unsafe experiences. For instance, some dependents who use mobility devices have trouble using dial-a-ride because of the lack of storage space for their devices. Some dependents who use the bus on their own struggle with navigation, making it an unideal mode in the eyes of their caregivers.

*We're in Washington County, we're here representing our daughter who lives in a separate house. She's also in Washington County not far from here, she has limited transportation other than Metro Mobility and as others have said there's significant issues with that. **We've had that exact same issue where basically they go past your house and kept her on the bus for an inordinate amount of time.***

We've got the little tracker on her phone and it's like 'what the heck is she doing in St. Paul at this time of day when she was going to go from Oakdale to Stillwater?'. That's her route.

Focus group for caregivers to young people with disabilities,
Washington County

Transportation efficiency is a top concern for caregivers.

Some caregivers noted that they chose the location of their residence out of proximity to family members, schools, or other common destinations to be as efficient as possible with their limited time. Some caregivers prefer to travel using a personal vehicle because it is faster and more reliable. Some who do not have access to a car struggle to get their dependents to school, events, or medical appointments. In households with a limited number of vehicles, some caregivers mentioned that their dependents like to travel more often, so they are not able to leave home as often as they would like.

*I try to double up on errands more now than I used to. I don't do it all the time since the kids have their activities so we are already going everywhere. If I have to go to the grocery store, instead of taking a separate trip, we'll go on the way to gymnastics—I think about this more when the gas tank is getting lower. **Cost is one thing but it's also cold. I never used to do it, but I've gotten better at coupling trips, with life being busy, let's make it as efficient as possible.***

Focus group for caregivers,
Anoka County

Families sometimes can't enroll their children in enrichment activities due to a lack of viable transportation options.

Caregivers said transportation was one of the factors preventing their children from participating in more activities outside of school. Several caregivers expressed regret over their children not being able to participate in activities and said they wish there was some organized busing options for students.

I think it would be more routes and schedules. Because there are times when the children, for example, we don't want to let her attend an art class because there is no transportation available, and if my spouse is working and I don't drive and we don't have another car, then she stays at home all the time, meaning they never do any extracurricular activity.

Focus group for Latino caregivers, Ramsey County

Asian people

WHO THEY ARE

People who identify as Asian.

KEY TOPICS

1. Safety was a top priority among Asian participants.
2. The cost of travel emerged as a top concern among Asian participants.
3. Asian participants expressed how varying abilities play a crucial role in their experience with transportation.
4. Many Asian participants rely on the bus to get around.
5. Asian people expressed a strong desire to be able to drive themselves.

Counties where focus groups were held



Number of focus groups where most or all participants were Asian

6

Asian people in the region

8%

Identities also represented in these focus groups

Younger people, adults, older adults, female, males, people who depend on transit

T's Story

For T, everyday racism is part of the mental load they carry as an Asian person using transportation in the metro area. T primarily uses the bus to get around.

What affects my psyche is that my community, Asian hate after pandemic, beating up older Asian people at the bus stop, it's all over the world. That was more of the issue, people are generally nice and kind, but misinformation made it dangerous. It's blindsiding. That's my main thing that bothers me and I hope we can resolve that in the future, because it's so nice to take public transit. So nice and fast. All of us when we travel we keep [our identity] in the back of our minds. Most of the shootings are in schools. Riding the bus is pretty public, people are nice, if they'll rob you they just ask you for change. We had a shooting in Michigan at the college at a bus stop, an Asian student, but that was on campus. We have to carry that with us being Asian. I love meeting different people on the bus, most are really nice because they have to do it.

Asian participants expressed how varying abilities play a crucial role in their experience with transportation.

Many participants expressed their desire to bike or walk places instead of using public transit, but feel limited in their abilities or access to convenient routes. Participants also mentioned age, gender, and mental stress as factors influencing their choice of transportation. Female or older participants identified these factors as risks when using public transit. Persons who have experienced negative encounters on the bus or train have actively avoided taking the bus or train when possible.

When I used to take the bus a lot for work. I would have liked to walk or bike. But because of Asthma it's not doable. The city isn't walkable most of the time.

Focus group for Asian youth,
Ramsey County

Many Asian participants rely on the bus to get around.

Many said the bus can have unpredictable arrival times, causing stress and possibly leading people to be forced to find other means of travel to their destinations. Also, bus stops were noted as being poorly maintained and as feeling unsafe with other people hanging out nearby. Some participants said that they feel safer on the bus than the light rail, as the driver is in closer proximity to the riders.

*For Minneapolis I'd say it's the people who hang around bus stops. Predators and people who might be missionaries. For the past few years, they have been very bad. Stuff with driver shortages and being late or early. **Bus stops themselves are not being managed well, you would be waiting 30 mins and there wouldn't be awnings or the lights in the winter would not work.***

Focus group for Asian youth, Ramsey County

The cost of travel emerged as a top concern among Asian participants.

The cost of travel determines whether many participants decide to take the bus, train, car, bike, or walk to get places. High gas prices hurt those with a long commute, and the pandemic has led to less frequent service from public transit. When a bus route is removed or changed, or the bus is delayed, users mentioned that they'll resort to spending money on an Uber or Lyft ride. This choice is usually determined by delays in public transit, safety at transit stops, or lack of alternative modes of transportation, like biking or scooter.

*Money is always an issue. And for the public transportation, most of the people riding their bike are those who are more demanding on the money issue. **So, I think it is a good idea to make public transportation free. If there is a way to lower the cost of public transportation it will encourage more people to use it.** It will help lower traffic jams and we prevent it in advance we can lower the cost of transportation a lot. With less cars we will have less potholes and less need to get auto-service for driving into the potholes. With more public transit, air quality will be better. And it's an all-win situation. More people using public transportation and less traffic jams, and you won't have to go into the office at 6am.*

Focus group for Chinese adults, Ramsey County

Safety was a top priority among Asian participants.

Participants expressed concern with taking public transit after dark, specifically Asian females and older adults. Some people noted how the bus can take a long time to arrive, and that they feel unsafe especially if there are others at the stop looking to engage with them. Also, the COVID-19 pandemic was mentioned a few times as having raised safety concerns for participants using public transit, for both health and discrimination reasons. Others shared how they avoid taking public transit in certain areas like Dinkytown or North Minneapolis due to their fear of altercations. For participants who said they feel safest driving, their concerns included driver's road rage and avoiding others risky driving behaviors.

*There's very strong men hitting the people around them. I felt at risk or unsafe. Around the downtown area, they don't break the glass, but near here, especially in this area, they break the glass. **This is the Riverside Station. This location is very unsafe. Next station is Franklin, it can be dangerous.***

Focus group for older Korean adults, Hennepin County

Asian people expressed a strong desire to be able to drive themselves.

Younger people stated that they prefer driving themselves to avoid bothering a relative or neighbor for a ride. Some participants also mentioned feeling unsafe while taking public transit due to harassment or the risk of danger. They shared their concerns about the cleanliness of transit, unhoused individuals using transit as shelter, and difficulties with transit schedules and navigating bus routes. These issues have led to a greater interest in driving themselves as a means of avoiding such risks and inconveniences.

*I used to take the bus all the time. I'm 21, so I used to go to Johnson transportation, and I hated it. **As soon as I turned 18, I got my license and a car. The buses were always scary. There were people that would creep me out. Seeing altercations on the bus. Or buses being late, and it was a struggle being late everywhere and having to take an hour to get everywhere.***

Focus group for Asian youth, Ramsey County

Black or African American people

WHO THEY ARE

People who identify as Black or African American.

KEY TOPICS

1. Safety concerns pose significant issues for Black people as they travel.
2. Weather conditions significantly influence travel decisions, particularly in the winter.
3. Access to public transit is crucial for many Black people, particularly those who do not own a personal vehicle.
4. Affordability plays a crucial role in the transportation choices of Black people.

Counties where focus groups were held



Number of focus groups where most or all participants were Black or African American

3

Black people or African Americans in the region

10%

Identities also represented in these focus groups

Adults, males, people who depend on transit, people experiencing housing insecurity, people living with disabilities

K's Story

K's story touches on some common themes seen in many stories of Black and African American people including the importance of affordable transportation and racial profiling on the light rail. K primarily drives to get around.

Well for me, last week I drove. This week I drove. However, if the gas prices get like \$5, I might start taking the bus...What I spend on gas on a weekly basis is super high. I fill my car up with \$60 every time I go to the pump, I at least once a week. So there's four weeks in a month, that's almost another car. I could save money if I did take the bus, but what time would I have to get up in the morning. I already get up at 5 in the morning to get here at nine, and I'm late then. So, its like, I don't know the bus system schedule right now but I do know that the bus out there do come pretty early because I can see it all the time when I'm on my balcony out there and I can see it right past my complex.

I don't really have any problems. I'm a single black female, and I don't really have a problem. Nobody gives me a problem on the bus. When I'm on the bus, I don't care where I'm at, I don't have any problem. But I have been asked before for my ticket on the light rail and I felt like they did that because I was black, they did, I felt that way because they didn't ask those other people on there, but they came straight to me. I said here you go, I ain't got no \$170 for you. I showed it right to them.

Safety concerns pose significant issues for Black people as they travel.

Many Black people feel unsafe or uncomfortable when walking at night or traveling on buses and light rail. They mentioned safety concerns related to personal security while interacting with strangers and witnessing poor behavior at transit stops and stations. Many avoid using buses due to stories they have heard and things they have witnessed.

When night comes, I'm in the house. I try not to be out at night. And I won't ride the bus at night.

Focus group for older Black adults,
Hennepin County

Weather conditions significantly influence travel decisions, particularly in the winter.

During winter, many Black people face difficulties traveling due to snow and ice, particularly when roads and sidewalks are poorly maintained. Some of them also have mobility issues, which, when combined with the poorly maintained sidewalks, makes it impossible to travel during winter.

And another thing I would ask them is, why, when the snow plow come, they do the streets or whatever, but when they put the snow in front of the crosswalk, why do they leave it there? That's one thing I want to know. I mean, people with wheelchairs, I feel sorry for them. And the older person, you can't get across the street. And then you go somewhere else, and you walk and you can't get back on the sidewalk, what's up with that?

Focus group for people without reliable transportation,
Hennepin County

Access to public transit is crucial for many Black people, particularly those who do not own a personal vehicle.

The availability and efficiency of public transportation services directly impact people’s ability to meet their daily needs and participate in their communities. Public transportation is relied upon by many, to reach essential destinations like work, grocery stores, food shelves, libraries, and their workplaces. For some, it is a means to visit family or participate in cultural and arts-related activities.

I live here. I take the bus and trains, oftentimes mostly to go to parks. I like to mostly go to the Mississippi River, but also I need that for medical appointments. I can no longer drive, because I have a disability, so it’s very important to me be able to utilize the transit system.

Focus group for people without reliable transportation, Hennepin County

Affordability plays a crucial role in the transportation choices of Black people.

Some opt to drive less to cut down on gas expenses, while others prefer alternative modes of transportation that are more economical. A few individuals mentioned receiving fare discounts based on their income, which underscores the significance of ensuring that public transit is accessible to all socioeconomic groups.

Cost is definitely making me travel in a certain way. I use my gas wisely. If I can’t do a round from work to home, if I’ve gotta go to the store I better go here first because I’m not going out of my way to use up my gas because it’s so high, I’m gonna be honest with you. If it ain’t on my route I don’t want to go.

Focus group for older Black adults, Hennepin County

East African people

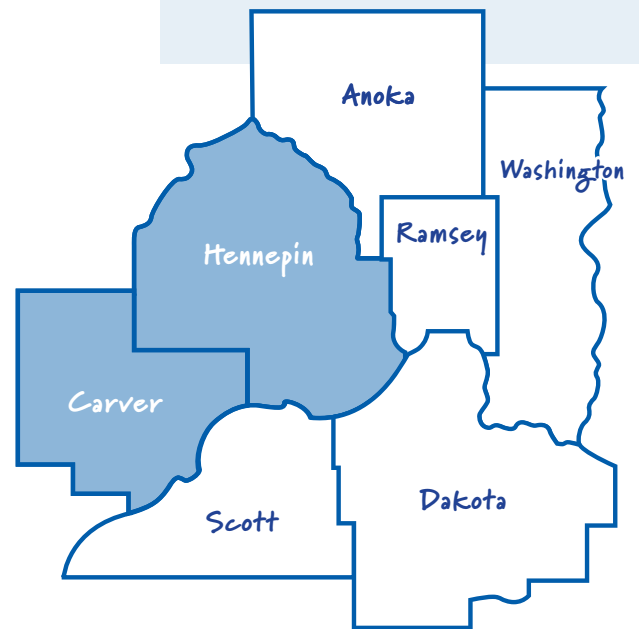
WHO THEY ARE

People who identify as East African.

KEY TOPICS

1. East African people need more reliable public transit, both in terms of more coverage and higher frequency on existing routes.
2. Many East African participants reported facing harassment for racial, religious, or gender reasons while traveling, especially on public transit.
3. Although there are transportation options available in the urban core, non-English speakers are unable to fully access them.

Counties where focus groups were held



Number of focus groups where most or all participants were East African

4

Somali, Ethiopian, and Eritrean immigrants in the region

2%

Identities also represented in these focus groups

Younger people, adults, older adults, female, males, caregivers, people who depend on transit

D's Story

D's story demonstrates a few commonalities that other East Africans experience using public transit: safety issues, harassment from other riders and issues with reliability, especially in winter weather. D uses the light rail and buses to get around.

My beard is bright orange, there are lots of situations. On the light rail people don't like me, or people will ask why I paint my beard. Trying to make fun of me. It's a tradition for seniors to paint their beards.

[I'm] missing medical appointments due to weather. Light rail stations are dangerous if they see someone alone buying a ticket. One time I had to run back home because someone was there and I had to cancel my appointment.

One thing we ask of Metro Transit is to have security patrol officers at light rail stations so people always feel safe to travel more. This is a key area for problems. Especially at the high boarding stations, near shopping malls, especially Lake Street. More people will use transit. There used to be heated shelters at stations but with the homeless encampment, they broke and destroyed it. Concerned that it will be broken again if it's repaired. But having it would be nice.

East African people need more reliable public transit, both in terms of more coverage and higher frequency on existing routes.

Many expressed a desire for a reliable bus system that would eliminate the need for personal cars. Some of those who already use buses reported being stranded at night without prior notification of service changes, indicating a need for more around-the-clock service.

As someone that's currently unemployed, I would like to see more public transit opportunities in our community as I struggle having to pay for gas and have reliable access to a car I can consistently use. I would also love to see more transit from Chaska to Normandale or Chaska to Metro Areas.

Focus group for Somali people,
Carver County

Many East African participants reported facing harassment for racial, religious, or gender reasons while traveling, especially on public transit.

Some noted feeling safer while traveling in groups. On public transportation, many participants felt wary around those who were being loud, smoking, or drinking because they are often confrontational with them. Many also expressed a need for better security and training for staff to help prevent these confrontations.

Some of my friends a few years ago we went to the mall, some white guy seemed bothered by us and threatened to call the cops. That's the first time I ever faced that on a train. He followed us to our stop here at Cedar, it was hectic but we got through it.

Focus group for East African Youth,
Hennepin County

Although there are transportation options available in the urban core, non-English speakers are unable to fully access them.

If a rider is lost or misses a stop, it is difficult to communicate with the driver or operator. Some have even faced provocation from bus drivers. These participants noted that they wish drivers had more culturally sensitive training, and that they feel safer when they see an East African bus driver. Participants who use Metro Mobility reported obstacles while communicating with drivers or the cost waiver office over the phone.

*We don't go far due to language barrier, and if something happens we don't know how to call police or tell someone what happened. Where we go depends on who's going with us, **we can't go everywhere we want due to language barrier**. Also identify as senior and Muslim, there are some places we don't feel comfortable.*

Focus group for Oromo older adults,
Hennepin County

Hispanic and Latino people

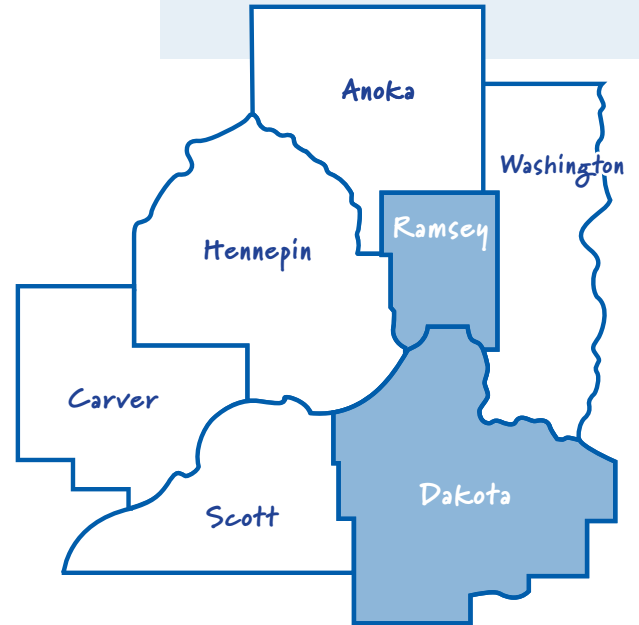
WHO THEY ARE

People who identify as Hispanic or Latino.

KEY TOPICS

1. A lack of public transportation in the suburbs dramatically affects Hispanic or Latino populations.
2. Hispanic or Latino households with limited transportation options must sacrifice some trips.
3. When access to transportation is not an issue, there are other cultural hurdles Hispanic or Latino participants noted.
4. Cost and safety are other barriers to transportation for Hispanic or Latino participants.

Counties where focus groups were held



Number of focus groups where most or all participants were Hispanic or Latino

3

Hispanics or Latinos in the region

7%

Identities also represented in these focus groups

Young people, adults, females, caregivers

E's Story

Like other Latinos, E's story touches on how their identity can shape their transportation experience, and how a lack of transportation can result in isolation. E takes the bus and walks.

I'm a student here and I live on campus, so most of my transportation is on the bus. I don't know how to ride a bike so it's just the bus. Mostly, like day-to-day or weekly, it's just like down Snelling or into Roseville. And then occasionally taking the train or bus to downtown Minneapolis as well for like how many days and stuff like that. Mostly what I will take is mostly buses, if not then like an Uber as far as public transit.

I mean, definitely, like the first one being a woman, but also being Latino, being brown, visibly Latino. And then generally being more compact as a person, like smaller as a person instead of a taller muscular person. Being from Chicago, it's a much less safe city and so I'm very hyper aware of, like, surroundings and time and who's around and stuff like that. You are seen as an easier victim in terms of safety, violence, a lot more criminal activity. Or even sexual harassment being a woman, and also the sexualization of Latina women, and general disregard for people of color, especially in public spaces and with the law. And also just I am simply not as tall or as strong or as easily defendable as someone who is larger than me.

At first I was really hesitant to explore because of that. And especially being Latino and being brown, it's just a giant barrier. This is a very white area, not the most safe, especially in the evening and afternoons. And so that got really like, I don't know if I should travel over there or if I should do it at this at this point. Maybe it's just easier to take an Uber or wait for a friend who can drive me.

A lack of public transportation in the suburbs dramatically affects Hispanic or Latino populations.

Compounded with a language barrier in some cases, there are many hurdles in place that dissuade Hispanic or Latino people from using public transportation more often. Riders face long wait times in harsh elements at outdated bus shelters that offer little shade or heat. Accessing the bus shelters can be difficult, too, having to walk on highways or icy roads that are uneven and poorly lit.

There are more buses in the [urban areas] because in the suburbs there aren't many stops, most of them near my house are within five minutes, so I take what I can get. If I didn't have a vehicle, I think I would have to take a Lyft or something to get to the bus.

Focus group for Latino youth, Ramsey County

Hispanic or Latino households with limited transportation options must sacrifice some trips.

Multiple Latino caregivers mentioned that their children are not able to attend after-school extracurriculars because they do not have a ride. If they relied on another family for transportation, they can only be involved in extracurriculars so long as the other family is as well. Public transportation at night is also limited, preventing some people from holding jobs that would require late night service availability.

I have two kids that were here a little bit ago playing soccer and a new friend gave them a ride and now they stopped doing that sport because I don't drive and there is no other transportation to take them. I would say that the possibilities from the school are numerous, from arts to sports, and now even cheerleading, which my daughter wants to try. It would be great if they offered transportation. There are many girls who want to do these activities but cannot because their mothers cannot take them in the afternoons. It would be great if the school could arrange for public transportation to offer these activities, imagine how wonderful it would be for the kids to participate.

Focus group for Latino caregivers, Ramsey County

When access to transportation is not an issue, there are other cultural hurdles Hispanic or Latino participants noted.

Some mentioned rude bus drivers and racism from other passengers, while others mentioned their difficulties navigating a complex transfer system through a language barrier. Generally, safety was a major concern for most participants who noted cultural hurdles. Some younger participants mentioned that they don't feel safe taking Uber or Lyft and it prevents them from holding consistent summer jobs. They say they would be able to work more if there were a bus, or even bike or scooter rentals available. Their caregivers echoed that for those who are immigrants, they remember their children not having to make safety and cost trade offs when making everyday trips as they do in the metro area.

Cost and safety are other barriers to transportation for Hispanic or Latino participants.

Those who had access to a vehicle mentioned the burden of maintenance costs, especially in the winter. Gas and insurance were two other notable expenses. The anxiety many participants faced when driving in the winter and getting into a costly accident also prevented them from taking trips. Most participants who discussed using Uber or Lyft noted cost as a barrier to using this option more frequently. Some said that it is not realistic to take a rideshare to work because the ride can cost more than they make in one shift, so they are losing money. However, with limited bus schedules and harsh weather, it is sometimes the most convenient option.

In my country, I felt that children and young people felt safe in the streets and taking any kind of transportation. All the moms would let their children go wherever they wanted, like to a friend's house. I'll pay for you to go and I'll pick you up at the stop. But since I arrived in this country, do social media make me change these ideas? When you get into these social media platforms, you see so much that you didn't see before where you lived. And yes, I feel very scared.

Focus group for Latino caregivers,
Ramsey County

Even if you have a car it can limit you and get out of hand. This season it has been running errands, going to work, and locking yourself up because of the roads. I slid twice this year, and it cost \$1,000 to get my car out.

Focus group for Latino caregivers,
Ramsey County

Native Americans

WHO THEY ARE

People who identify as Native American or Indigenous. There was only one focus group with Native Americans—a group of Native American women from Hennepin County.

KEY TOPICS

1. Native women emphasized safety and security as key to a better transportation experience.
2. Native Americans voiced the need for culturally integrated solutions to make transportation better.

Counties where focus groups were held



Number of focus groups where most or all participants were Native American

1

Native Americans in the region

1%

Identities also represented in these focus groups

Adults, female

C's Story

C's story expresses concern for safety of her and her family while traveling, a theme that other Native Americans also expressed. C primarily drives themselves and their children.

I drive, I actually spent a lot of money [on my car]. I'm like "car poor" because I bought a really nice car but because of the kids I have and the weather I need to have a dependable car. Do I need to walk more? Yes. Do I need to take public transportation more? I do it for fun sometimes just to get out and, you know, ride around. But recently I haven't because it seems like it's really unclean, like needles, a lot of extracurricular activity I don't want to be around or my kids to be around. So now I kind of stay away from it... everything I do is like within like a 5 block radius when it comes to work and living, but when I play, I bring my kids far out so I have to drive. So, for me, it is having a bunch of kids and car seats in my car, and, like I said, driving down areas that are hot spots I guess, where there's a lot of accidents, a lot of people who don't really give a crap.

It's also driving as an indigenous woman in other areas where even though all my kids are in car seats, I am fully insured and I got my license, you still get that kind of...whenever the cops are around, like 'Oh my God.' Especially if they're around you and you know they're running your plates and you know that it's gonna be good, but still, it's a trigger, because, you know, what the hell they going to do now or what they're going to say, you know what I mean? And I just don't want to have to deal with something like that with my kids in the car, especially my 10-year-old, especially with everything that's been going on in our community. She's very well aware of what's been going on and I make sure of that.

Native women emphasized safety and security as key to a better transportation experience.

Native women said they often don't feel safe around strangers while traveling. They expressed concern about drugs and fighting on both buses and trains, and police about racial profiling while driving. Some participants felt that there is more focus on transportation safety in the suburbs, and less in Minneapolis.

I don't feel safe on the bus, I don't feel safe walking, I don't feel safe on the train.

I take my daughter all over with me. I made her get on the other side of me when we saw people doing drugs. That has become normalized and it's not okay. We had a talk about the love of people but knowing that is not normal or acceptable. When I talk about not feeling safe, it's nowadays when the crime rate is so high. The response to our needs as residents for safety is very low. In other areas, like the suburbs, they are more protected. We deserve a good life and to have safe transportation.

Focus group for Native American women,
Hennepin County

Native Americans voiced the need for culturally integrated solutions to make transportation better.

They described a nexus between their identities (women, Native) and feeling targeted or vulnerable while walking, driving, or taking transit. Participants emphasized the need to recognize their identities in safety solutions. One participant pointed to distrust of the police and suggested hiring outreach workers for the light rail. Another person cited the importance of having Native facilitators for engagement to create a safe space for sharing feedback.

*I've always wondered, how come the train doesn't have a route for unsheltered relatives. Has a place to warm up and has resources. **With security guards, hopefully they are trained with BIPOC folks, we need someone who looks like us.** I've traveled to New York, and they have security and I thought that was really cool and I've wondered if they have a courtesy for unsheltered folks. There's a trauma when you see a cop. Unless you hire people from the community. You can't be having anybody.*

Focus group for Native American women,
Hennepin County

White people

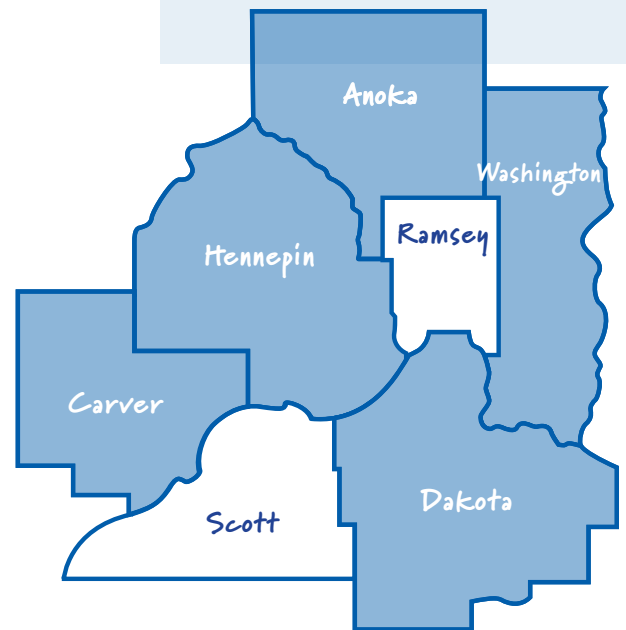
WHO THEY ARE

People who identify as white.

KEY TOPICS

1. Driving, despite its drawbacks like congestion and safety concerns, remains a preferred mode of transportation.
2. People are less likely to ride public transportation due to safety concerns and convenience.
3. People's transportation options are limited in the winter due to safety concerns and lack of winter maintenance on roads and sidewalks.
4. There was a common theme among participants of fearing for their safety while using different forms of transportation.
5. Dial-a-ride services are unreliable, and do not meet the needs of the people who need to use the service.

Counties where focus groups were held



Number of focus groups where most or all participants were White

5

White people in the region

74%

Identities also represented in these focus groups

Adults, older adults, males, caregivers, people who depend on transit

B's Story

B's story touches on themes seen in other white people's stories including a discussion on safety both while driving and taking public transportation. B primarily drives to get around.

We have two cars but we only use one. I've been retired maybe 4 years. Yea pothole watch this week. So I have to drive, they put the manhole covers are really kind low so you really get a big bump. The other thing with the roads, when they repair the road here, they don't do a very good job, they are still cracking. They need to reconsider doing the roads the correct way the first time. Instead of trying to do them cheaply to make them last longer. I think the speed limits are much too high. I grew up in Saint Paul. The speed limits are much higher down here than in Saint Paul. We had a high schooler killed crossing the street, on 140th right by the high school. It is 45 miles per hour right by the high school playing fields, that's way too fast.

I used to occasionally use the bus. When I would get on the bus it was so hot, because they wouldn't run the AC in morning. One day I had to go take a shower when I got to work. I was so miserable. And then they changed the schedule too, for coming back home. So, I kept waiting an extra half an hour at the Mall of America. Because you would see the bus pulling out right when you got here. The other thing about transportation down here, my son worked in Burnsville [and would] get off at 10 p.m. There wasn't a bus system for him to come over 42, to come home. Instead, he had to go way down to the bus center on Nicollet. And wait an hour to take a bus that would take another 45 minutes to get him up to Apple Valley. So I was picking him up doing that, and I was exhausted working nights and days, as a nurse.

People are less likely to ride public transportation due to safety concerns and convenience.

Many people stated that there are multiple barriers preventing them from riding the bus or train, including fear of negative interactions with other riders, weather, personal disabilities, age, and that it is unaccommodating to pets and children. Riders also felt that public transportation is generally less convenient and would rather use other services like ride-hailing to get to where they need to go, especially if they have baggage or children with them. Some riders shared that bus systems are less accessible in the areas they live outside of the city. Others have a positive experience with the bus and train systems and use them to get to work, sporting events, or for daily errands.

There was a common theme among participants of fearing for their safety while using different forms of transportation.

Whether walking, driving, or using public transportation, people had similar fears of feeling unsafe. Some people said they avoid going places early in the morning or after dark due to fears of being assaulted. Older people said they are less likely to use public transportation because they feel they are a target since they are less mobile. Others said they want to use public transportation, but do not due to fears of high crime and lack of security on the trains and buses, especially in downtown Minneapolis.

Just like everybody here. I would take it if I knew it was safe. There was a Star Tribune article about safety issues on the light rail. I don't think I'll ever get on it. I just want it to be safe, clean, and on time. It's just kind of scary a little bit. I'd just rather drive myself. Everybody would flock to the train or bus if they knew that.

Focus group for older adults,
Hennepin County

I haven't driven for about 14 months. I am hoping that that will change after surgery. My transportation is my wife...The other thing is safety around and aboard various vehicles utilized whether its buses or light rail. Honestly, I would like to go to downtown Minneapolis, and wouldn't mind taking the light rail. But I do not feel like it is safe and I feel like especially since I am older and less ambulatory then I used to be. I'm kind of, ya know, pretty nice picking for somebody because I am not that mobile. That is slowly being addressed, but now fast enough and ridership overall plays that out.

Focus group for older adults, Dakota County

People’s transportation options are limited in the winter due to safety concerns and lack of winter maintenance on roads and sidewalks.

There was a common theme among people with varying transportation methods that it is difficult to get where they need to go in the winter. People who drove a personal vehicle said it is hard to see roadways when driving in the winter, and are nervous driving when their children are with them. Some people want to see better road maintenance, while others have had positive experiences with roads being cleared where they live. People who get around via public transportation, or by walking and rolling, said that it is difficult to access sidewalks and bus stops due to poor winter maintenance. This makes it difficult to meet basic needs like grocery shopping or making it to work on time.

The winter months are hard. I’m going with snow pants and my jacket if I don’t have enough money. And if I have enough on my card to get food stamps, I’ll go out and push my cart from place to place. The thing that I worry about is slick roads and when people don’t shovel the sidewalk, then you’re going on the road and people think you’re crazy going to get groceries. Maybe it’s that I’m too proud to ask for help but I’d rather wing it over wasting 3 dollars, or 7 dollars one way and back because that’s money spent for me and that’s a struggle for winter when you’re going on slick roads or sidewalks that aren’t paved and it’s hard.

Focus group for people without reliable transportation, Carver County

Dial-a-ride services are unreliable, and do not meet the needs of the people who need to use the service.

Many people shared that they have negative experiences with dial-a-ride services, including Metro Mobility, Darts, SmartLink, and more. Most people stated that services are rarely on time and has long wait times, making it very difficult to be on time to medical appointments or other commitments. This causes a lot of stress for people who rely on the service as their main form of transportation. Some people have had negative interactions with the bus drivers, stating that they don’t ensure riders make it into their house safely, or drive by their house. Others have positive experiences with drivers, stating that they go above and beyond to ensure they arrive home safely. Some people feel that the service is not accommodating to people with mental disabilities, especially since it is an unreliable service. People feel uncomfortable having loved ones with disabilities use the service, since there isn’t a clear time when they will be picked up or dropped off. Suggestions of improvements to the service include a tracking system for the vehicle, an assistant on the bus to help communicate with disabled riders, and implementing more reliable and timely options.

Making appointments can be really difficult due to the large pick-up windows, since if you’re late to too many appointments you can be taken off the schedule, even if it is completely out of your control due to Metro Mobility being late.

Focus group for caregivers to young people with disabilities, Washington County

Driving, despite its drawbacks like congestion and safety concerns, remains a preferred mode of transportation.

Many of the respondents shared that if they have the option, they prefer to use their personal vehicle to run errands and get to their destination. There was a common theme of frustration with traffic, speeding, and reckless driving from others on the road, which discouraged them from driving as often. People suggested lowering speed limits to help address this. Some people feel more comfortable carpooling with other people for safety and assistance with directions, especially at night. A few people noted that they like public transportation, but that it is easier and more convenient to drive their personal vehicle, especially when transporting children. Some respondents indicated that they are no longer able to drive their personal vehicle for a variety of reasons, including injury, age, and safety. When they are unable to drive, they prefer to have friends and family help with their personal transportation.

I'm [name], and I live to drive. I'm constantly on some adventure or another, been doing it all my life...[my car] takes me where I want to go because I do a lot of it. A couple of years ago, I drove 9,000 miles on a sentimental journey by myself all over the country. Now I go up to the, it is time to go up to the North Shore. Check the ice flows and things up there. I'm totally dependent on my vehicle, but I share it with my family. They use it sometimes.

Focus group for older adults, *Dakota County*

Women

WHO THEY ARE

People who identify as female.

KEY TOPICS

1. Women said they worry about their personal security, especially at night and around male strangers.
2. Some women shared stories of harassment, abuse, or violence when traveling.
3. Some women noted caregiving as central to their identities.

Counties where focus groups were held



Number of focus groups where most or all participants were women

10

Women people in the region

50%

Identities also represented in these focus groups

Asians, East Africans, Hispanic or Latinos, Native Americans, younger people, adults, caregivers, people who depend on transit, people experiencing housing insecurity, people living with disabilities

A's Story

A shared her experience of needing to be situationally aware when she travels, a sentiment echoed by many women. A relies on the bus, light rail, walking and getting rides from others to get around and has experienced abusive encounters with police on the light rail.

Sometimes I get a ride in the morning, but [my driver] is really slow, so I get here later. But it's safer [than another type of transportation]. The other thing about getting a ride down University, though, is the potholes! [My driver is] like, swerving this way and that way, everyone's driving way too fast and swerving, like okay. I'd rather take the freeway because that gives me less anxiety than the swerving. The roads are so bad.

I feel like, as women, we live with that every day, despite any transportation method we use. You're just situationally aware, like this [expletive] is coming up right behind me or, you know, he's following me, or are they following me? I don't want nobody knowing where I live. I'll even go a different way, I'll go around the block, like is he still following me?

I've done it, I've gotten off the train and the bus because I wasn't comfortable. It was a safety thing for me to do it, but it was an unsafe thing for me to do because it was below zero outside and the next bus wasn't for 45 minutes at 11 o'clock at night. So, it's like, what's the lesser of the two evils? Should I have stayed on, because now I'm freezing, and there's nobody around and anybody could snatch me. I don't trust the police. The one time you get on the train out of all of the days you don't, I see people who should've been pulled off the train.

The rough thing for me that happened recently was my police interaction [on the light rail]. Before this job, I was an outreach worker and I would ride the train so I got to know a lot of the Metro Transit police, and it happened to be two that I knew. They obviously knew me as well and told me that they knew me before they threw me off out the [Green Line] door on Capitol/Rice. You know, I hit my shoulder but then my head ricocheted off the sidewalk.

Women expressed worry over their personal security, especially at night and around male strangers.

Many women participants shared concerns over their personal safety and security. At times, these concerns have prevented them from using certain modes of transportation, including ride-hail, train, and walking alone, especially at night. Women learn to avoid secluded, unsheltered, unlit areas when they are alone at night whenever possible. Women learn these lessons young; youth participants shared learning from their parents or caregivers to avoid certain types of travel, times of day, or types of destinations because they're unsafe for women.

As a woman, I avoid walking at night or just in general, alone. I was told not to do that, and so I'd be scared to walk alone at night, or go on a run at night. And then like, even going to the gas station at night, I have a car but I'll still avoid doing that. My mom's always told me not to go to the gas station by myself at night out of safety concerns.

Focus group for women experiencing housing insecurity,
Ramsey County

Some women noted caregiving as central to their identities.

Some women's day-to-day trips revolve around their family's activities. Participants noted making trade offs between taking trips for leisure and taking trips to run errands. Chaining multiple trips together was a key behavior for many of the women caregivers—grouping multiple trips together in one outing to save time in their busy schedule for other things beside travel.

As a mom, you learn to be efficient. When my kids were in school, you had conferences, and events, you just have to get things done. You go with the flow and think, 'how can I get this done?' I would tell my mom I'll come pick you up and go grocery shopping together, we do hers and mine at the same time.

Focus group for caregivers,
Anoka County

Some women shared stories of harassment, abuse, or violence when traveling.

Women experience harms on transportation, especially from male strangers. Women share their stories with each other, and those stories lead to a heightened sense of awareness when traveling at night and among male strangers. A handful of women who noted violence on the bus or train mentioned that their children were traumatized by it as well, which makes them far less willing to use public transportation in the future. Some immigrant women remembered feeling safer in their home countries sending their children around on public transportation, but they would not do that in Minnesota.

*[One of our clients] has to ask for a ride once in a while. The person who brings her asks for hugs that seem inappropriate. When you're so tied to asking and not able to get around in other ways, **you feel like you have no choice, when it's between getting food vs inappropriate hug, it's terrible to be thinking about making those choices.***

Focus group for people without reliable transportation,
Dakota County

Men

WHO THEY ARE

People who identify as male.

KEY TOPICS

1. Cost is central to how men make transportation decisions.
2. Many people wish there were less potholes, easier parking, better driver behavior, and less congestion.
3. Some men feel unsafe on public transportation due to personal security issues, but at notably lower rates than women.

Counties where focus groups were held



Number of focus groups where most or all participants were men

4

Men in the region

50%

Identities also represented in these focus groups

Asians, Black or African Americans, East Africans, white people, younger people, adults, people who depend on transit, people experiencing housing insecurity, people living with disabilities

J's Story

J acknowledges a few shared themes among many men: cost is a huge determining factor for how he travels, and he has some reservations about being around strangers while traveling but generally feels he can get to where he needs to go without too much difficulty. J primarily takes the bus, light rail, and rides his bike.

Every time I tell my wife to take the bus or Light Rail, my wife tells me to be careful. I never have an issue because I am a tall man. I never ever considered that issue. Until sometime when I was on the light rail. A lot of strangers doing strange things. That makes me reconsider. That kind of situation made me hesitant to use that route again. I've changed cars to feel safer. Talking about Identity, I am Asian. Even though I do not consider my identity to be danger to me, other people might look at me differently because I am different to them. To decide what kind of transportation tool you are going to pick.

Overall, I do not feel any safety issues driving or really biking either. Especially when biking on a good bike route I truly enjoy the transportation. I never consider biking a danger to me except in the winter. But public transportation light rail could be a big issue. Because we cannot exclude these people that somehow rely on the light rail for shelter. But we need to come up with a way to get it under control. In the past, it was quite often for your ticket to be checked. I'm not sure if it's true, but I heard they don't check anymore, and policemen never go on the light rail anymore. Based on my experience I think it is true, I never see ticket checks. And for the last I don't know how long I do not see anyone checking. The result is more and more homeless people are using the light rail as a shelter for themselves. If they occupy it and do strange things, do dangerous things, and make you feel unsafe, that is an issue. Not just female or any identity even for regular males I have concerns about safety too. Bus to me is okay because there is a driver you need to go through him. Light rail we have a driver, but they are so far away. We have to do something to make the light rail safer.

Money is always an issue. And for the public transportation, most the people riding their bike are those who are more demanding on the money issue. So, I think it is a good idea to make

public transportation free. If there is a way to lower the cost of public transportation it will encourage more people to use it. It will help lower traffic jams and we prevent it in advance we can lower the cost of transportation a lot. With less cars we will have less potholes and less need to get auto-service for driving into the pothole. With more public transit air quality will be better. And it's an all-win situation. More people using public transportation and less traffic jam and you won't have to go into the office at 6:00 a.m.

Some participants feel unsafe on public transportation due to personal security issues, but at notably lower rates than women.

Although several men said they were comfortable traveling on public transportation, some also said they have concerns for their own personal security around strangers having mental health events. Many who expressed personal security issues said they have considered alternative modes of transportation to avoid the bus or light rail, like ride-share, walking, or biking.

But the train, it would help if they had police officer, somebody, on each car to watch for, especially on the last two cars, they are terrible. I always get on the first car, where I see the driver/conductor...I always sit with my back towards the, you know where nobody is sitting because I don't like sitting with other people behind me. I always sit with my back to the wall. Because you don't know what that person is gonna do. I like to watch everything. But other than that, the system is pretty good. That's it.

Focus group for people experiencing housing insecurity,
Hennepin County

Cost is central to how men make transportation decisions.

Many men participants who drive wish the cost of gas was lower, as they have had to choose when to travel due to the high cost of gas. Some choose to travel primarily using public transportation, walking, or biking because it is cheaper than driving.

Cost is everything. I was born in Kansas City, and I used to go down every year to visit friends and relatives. I can't now, gas is too much.

Focus group for people without reliable transportation,
Carver County

Many people wish there were less potholes, easier parking, better driver behavior, and less congestion.

A lot of participants who have access to a reliable vehicle are able to get where they need to go, but still have stress about the pavement quality and other people's poor driving behaviors. Also, they wish there was less congestion and easier parking and will avoid driving at certain times of the day or to certain destinations to avoid busy areas or difficult parking.

For me, I see the news and the TV is talking about road rages. They occur quite often. If I am driving, I am driving to be less aggressive and try not to cut into somebody's lane and not push anyone too hard. I try not to intimidate somebody else as much as possible.

Focus group for Chinese adults,
Ramsey County

Younger people (Under 35)

WHO THEY ARE

Younger people below the age of 35.

KEY TOPICS

1. The cost of travel is a crucial factor for participants under 35 when choosing a mode of transportation.
2. Weather plays a large role in travel for people under 35, especially for newer drivers and people who rely on public transit or walking to get around.
3. Many participants under 35 rely on public transit to get around and wish it was safer and more reliable.
4. Younger people are willing to take steps to combat climate change by opting for more environmentally friendly modes of transportation.

Counties where focus groups were held



Number of focus groups where most or all participants were younger people

6

Younger people (under 35) in the region

23%

Identities also represented in these focus groups

Asians, East Africans, Hispanic or Latinos, females, males, people who depend on transit

T's Story

T touches on a number of themes echoed by other people under 35, including a desire for safe and sustainable transportation options. T drives, gets a ride from others, and walks to get around.

I drive myself. I have people drive me, and I run and walk. Combinations of those. I think most of it is potholes and traffic sometimes during rush hour. Yesterday I was trying to get to my chiro and there was construction in the way, so I just turned around and went back home. There was a dead end to the street and I was like this is too much work, so I just went home. [Build] roads that are durable so they don't have to fix it every year. It gets really annoying sometimes when that road is your favorite road and it's always closed.

[The highway is] fast, easy, as long as you know where you're going. 35 is close to home, 94 is right down the street. The highways make it a lot easier to travel. I think going to the downtown busy area is not fun. I want to visit my friends who live in an apartment down there, but parking sucks. There was this one time when I got into a car accident, and after that I kind of avoided that road for a while. Because there's no stoplight, there's just a stop sign. It's literally this road right here, down the street, Larpenteur and Arcade. I don't know. I avoided that for a while because it brings back trauma, but also it's just not a safe road because there's so many cars traveling and there was construction at the time, so all the cars were pushed over to the stop sign and that's why the accident happened. If there was a stop light, that would have been different.

I do feel scared when I want to go exercise or walking around the neighborhood can sometimes be a little scary as a woman. Even coming up from my own driveway, I get scared sometimes at nighttime when you come back late and you see people walking around and you're like 'ahhh' maybe they're looking at a car that's about to stop or something. Even while driving, getting catcalled. I just experienced that today on Payne Avenue.

Maybe at the bus stop having something that has air for people who are taking buses. Even in the wintertime having some type of heater because you can get real cold. At the train stops they have those, but I could see it at the metro stop, especially in outer kind of suburbs area.

I mean I know how bad the car is for the environment, so trying to limit our travel as much as possible, or maybe using another form of transportation that doesn't hurt the environment. Walk more, bike more, I don't know. I like that Minnesota is starting the bike lanes, but sometimes [biking] right by the car is a little scary. And then, I just remembered an instance, I was running back from volleyball the other day and there was no sidewalk, so running on the grass doesn't feel as safe.

Many participants under 35 who rely on public transit to get around wish it was safer and more reliable.

Some participants under 35 noted how riding the bus can result in long commute times, especially when buses are running late, or they miss a transfer. Participants expressed frustration at the timing of buses, citing that they are often unreliable and late to arrive. Being young influences how safe participants feel when navigating public transit. Participants are most concerned with facing altercations with others while using transit. Some noted that the overall quality of roads poses risks for their physical safety as well. Potholes were recognized as a major problem, causing significant damage to cars, and posing danger to bikers along the road.

Making [transit] more reliable, more timely and also being able to get different places in a more accessible way than taking 17 different connections would probably be like the two biggest things, at least for me.

Focus group for young women, Ramsey County

The cost of travel is a crucial factor for participants under 35 when choosing a mode of transportation.

Participants under 35 explained that owning a car can be expensive due to monthly payments, insurance, repairs, and gas. The overall costs of owning a car make it difficult for many people to afford one, which is why they often rely on public transit, biking, or walking to get around. Some participants expressed the desire to make driving cheaper, as it is the only mode of transportation they feel they can rely on. Others suggested improving the reliability of other transportation options like buses or walking, so they don't have to rely on their cars as much.

*I would say owning a car. **Monthly payments, gas, repair. It was expensive.** All around.*

Focus group for Asian youth,
Ramsey County

People under 35 are willing to take steps to combat climate change by opting for more environmentally friendly modes of transportation.

Several participants shared how they want to use more eco-friendly modes of transportation. Some said they value walking, biking or public transit as primary ways to travel because they are better for the environment than driving but they wish they were more accessible so that they could use them more often.

For climate change, I'm thinking about carpooling, If we're going to the same place, it doesn't make sense to drive separate cars, so I feel like I'm trying to think about that, and just be the most efficient in that way, so we're not all driving to the same place at the same time.

Focus group for Asian youth,
Ramsey County

Weather plays a large role in travel for people under 35, especially for newer drivers and people who rely on public transit or walking to get around.

Weather plays a significant role in how participants under 35 choose their mode of transportation. Winter proves to be difficult in getting to bus stops that are far away, and the stops themselves are not habitable for more than a few minutes in cold temperatures. Participants expressed a desire to add heat lamps to bus stops, like the ones available at some train stations.

I don't drive in the winter as much either because they never plow the roads around my area. There's a school there but they still don't plow it, I don't understand why...A lot of cars get stuck, even when they're not driving and they're parked, they'll still slide down and hit the car in front of it. The school is in the pit, and everything is going down that way. I don't know why they constructed it that way, and they don't plow it. That's frustrating.

Focus group for Asian youth, Ramsey County

Adults (35-64)

WHO THEY ARE

Adults ages 35 to 64.

KEY TOPICS

1. Family arose as a common topic for adults when considering their daily transportation needs.
2. Adults often mentioned access to food when talking about how they travel.
3. Aspects of identity surfaced as a common topic when asking adults about their experiences using transportation.
4. Adults said weather plays an influential role on their decisions around transportation.
5. Adults regularly expressed concerns over the reliability of public transportation in the metro area.

Counties where focus groups were held



Number of focus groups where most or all participants were adults

10

Adults (35-64) in the region

63%

Identities also represented in these focus groups

Asians, Black or African Americans, East Africans, Hispanic or Latinos, Native Americans, white people, females, males, caregivers, people who depend on transit, people living with disabilities

M's Story

M has access to a reliable vehicle and is, therefore, able to get around without too much hassle. They make an insightful comparison to their aging parents' struggles with transportation.

I have four children. I'm an empty nester. My youngest is out to school. My parents live about maybe 5 minutes away from me, and now they are out of the home I have more time with my parents, so the Y is our activity almost every night. We spend a lot of time here. I'm also involved with our church... I surround my activities with work and my parents.

I think for me if it's like right now with COVID we've been able to work from home. If I knew we were gonna have a rough morning with the traffic map being red, I reschedule my visits to when the roads have cleared out a little bit. Managing what you can and can't control, if it's bad and they're saying work from home you can reschedule. I still have to work within my work schedule, but with my parents being so close, I can go out there, it's a quick 5-minute stop.

I think because I'm still able to drive, to me, it's not a barrier because as long as I have a reliable car I can get around without hassle. But my parents, because they're aging, when they want to go somewhere, they have to plan. My mom's vision is getting worse, so she relies on me especially when it's getting dark. I take her grocery shopping so we do have to work [together]... the over-65 population will be struggling if they don't have someone to help them shop that means they have to figure out how to get from A to B. And if they can't drive, they rely on public transportation or Metro Mobility and that becomes a hassle. They have to schedule their activities around when they know they can catch their rides. My mom's still able to drive during the daytime and we have siblings and we call on each other to provide that support.

Family arose as a common topic for adults when considering their daily transportation needs.

Many adults are the primary caregivers in their families and, as such, talked about driving their dependents, sharing a car between multiple family members, and coordinating carpooling or rideshare. Having a reliable dial-a-ride service is a priority among participants who use it to schedule rides for their children or family members with disabilities. Many shared concerns with having their children take the bus.

I can just say that as an adult my kid can't plan any of her activities without involving me.

Focus group for caregivers to young people with disabilities, Washington County

Adults often mentioned access to food when talking about how they travel.

Many adults are responsible for getting food not only for themselves, but others in their family as well. When adults do not live close to an affordable grocery store, many have to spend a lot of time getting to and from the store, especially if they do not have a reliable vehicle. Many adults also expressed concern over getting groceries when they share a car among family members or are inhibited by winter weather. Participants who do not have a vehicle expressed a desire to be able to walk to an affordable, quality grocery store, if not take one bus route to get there.

I would rather go to Chaska for groceries, there's all these suspect foods here. The Target has hardly any food and it's for rich people so I can't shop there.

Focus group for people without reliable transportation, Carver County

Adults regularly expressed concerns over the reliability of public transportation in the metro area.

Topics like location of bus stops, safety of transit, timing of bus arrivals and departures, and not having access to public transit often came up in conversation. Adults want more consistent and reliable buses throughout the day, not just during rush hours, and want to feel safe when using public transit. Also, some participants expressed frustration that if they had better access to a reliable bus route, they would not have to rely on cars as much.

*I would like to use transit more, especially going downtown because then I don't have to pay for parking. Or if I go out to dinner with friends northeast. I don't have to worry about driving home. **Because of the safety concern on the public transit. I try to avoid that I guess.***

Focus group for Chinese adults,
Ramsey County

Aspects of identity surfaced as a common topic when asking adults about their experiences using transportation.

Many talked about other aspects of their identities other than age as being an influence over how they make transportation decisions. For example, many adult women expressed concerns over their individual safety when taking the bus or train, and adults living with disabilities shared that they feel limited in their transportation options overall. The intersecting aspects of adult identities influence individuals experiences using any mode of transportation.

*I will say being a female and Asian, I would be more concerned about **safety on public transit.** Certain places and locations and times, it would be a big concern. We heard a lot of crime, not just against particular racial groups, but also being a female. So that's one big thing I think of.*

Focus group for Chinese adults,
Ramsey County

Adults shared how weather plays an influential role on their decisions around transportation.

Winter weather makes transportation more difficult for all adults. Piles of snow at the corners of sidewalks and near bus stops make it difficult for people to get on and off the bus. Participants shared how ice on the roadway and snow building up along driveways, alleys and residential roads make it difficult to commute to places by car, as well as causing safety concerns for many drivers.

In the winter, it's ridiculous to me that there isn't snow removal at the corners. That is absurd to me that to take the bus people have to climb over three feet of snow and ice. It's the largest impediment, I think, for people in Minnesota taking the bus in the winter... There just needs to be a budget to clear the snow so people can enter and exit safely.

Focus group for Black adults, Hennepin County

Older Adults (65+)

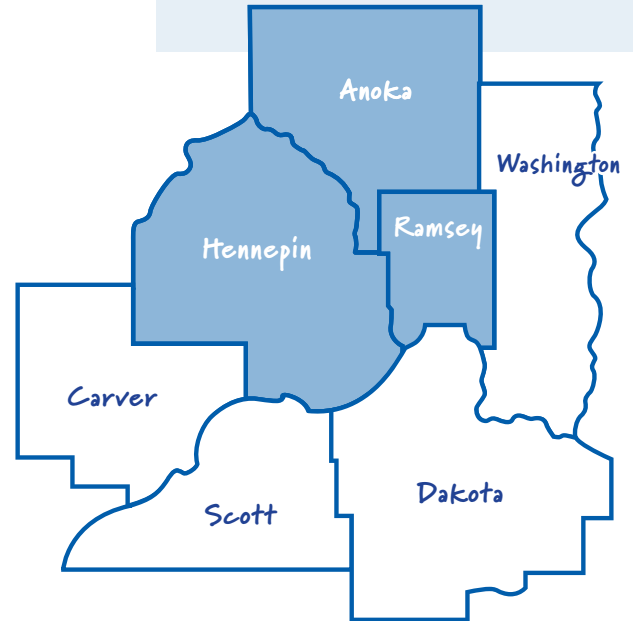
WHO THEY ARE

People who are 65 years or older.

KEY TOPICS

1. Older adults are concerned about their safety and personal security on public transit.
2. Accessibility and mobility underscore the challenges facing older adults in traveling in the Twin Cities region.
3. For older adults who use buses and dial-a-ride services, their relationships with their drivers are important to their daily travel experiences.
4. Older adults frequently use dial-a-ride services but find dial-a-ride limiting in a variety of ways

Counties where focus groups were held



Number of focus groups where most or all participants were older adults

6

Older adults (65+) in the region

14%

Identities also represented in these focus groups

Asians, Black or African Americans, East Africans, white people, caregivers, people who depend on transit, people living with disabilities

C's Story

C's description of no longer being able to drive is emblematic of many older adults' struggles. C primarily relies on the bus to get around.

I think that my age, as I've gotten older I don't work, and have less money, When I lived out in the suburbs and had to work, then I had to have a car because there was no reliable public transportation. But now that I'm older and I don't work anymore, it affects what I can afford. I can't afford a car, or don't want to spend the money for the car. I like the idea of public transportation that is affordable, so that I can still get around and not be isolated. That's why I won't live out in the boonies anymore, because you're isolated out there. You don't have your own transportation, so I like to live where there is transportation where I can move around and feel less restricted as far as coming and going and what have you. Yes, I think most people if they had the money or needed to, they would have a car, a vehicle, cos that's the American way, right? But the states that provide public transportation, for people who for whatever reason don't want to or whatever, pay for a car, they can still be mobile, I think that's an excellent thing. You go out to other countries and whatever, they don't have that.

Older adults are concerned about their safety and personal security on public transit.

Older adults shared unease regarding the prevalence of criminal activities and the potential risks associated with using buses and light rail systems. They expressed fears around high rates of violence and their fear extended to their family and friends.

*For me, I told my daughter, if **your kids need to go somewhere, they aren't taking the bus or light rail because there's too much killing and too much gang violence.***

Focus group for Black older adults,
Hennepin County

Accessibility and mobility underscore the challenges facing older adults in traveling in the Twin Cities region.

Participants expressed difficulties in walking and using public transportation due to physical limitations. They highlight the challenges of walking longer distances and boarding buses with steep steps, which can be particularly taxing for those with mobility issues. This problem is exacerbated during winter months when icy and snow-covered sidewalks make it even more challenging to walk without falling and to access bus stops and light rail stations.

Being old, getting in and out of a bus is no picnic. Those steps are pretty darn high and steep. We just don't move as well as we used to.

Focus group for older adults,
Dakota County

Older adults frequently use dial-a-ride services, but find dial-a-ride limiting in a variety of ways.

Dial-a-ride users were frustrated with the long wait times, limited hours of operation, and cost of the services. For people who rely on dial-a-ride, they say they are regularly late to events like medical appointments, or they are unable to make it to certain destinations at all.

Metro Mobility is too late. I am always late for my appointments. They'll seat me but, it's on the way. I wish it would come right on time. That would be a lot easier.

Focus group for older adults,
Hennepin County

For older adults who use buses and dial-a-ride services, their relationships with their drivers are important to their daily travel experiences.

Participants expressed a strong appreciation for the relationships they have developed with certain bus drivers. These connections go beyond the typical passenger-driver interaction and evolve into supportive, familiar relationships. Some drivers demonstrate understanding and empathy, especially towards regular riders, and may be more lenient in certain situations, like allowing someone on the bus even if they lack the exact fare. Participants also note that such supportive relationships with bus drivers can extend to other riders as well. They observe instances of kindness and camaraderie among fellow passengers, exemplifying how public transportation can become a shared space for building community and connections.

*There are people that ride those buses on a regular basis. **The people I am speaking for. I think they build community.** I know that if this kid rides that 615, if he doesn't have the right change, they let him on the bus.*

Focus group for older adults, Hennepin County



Conclusion

The Metropolitan Council organized the Transportation Needs in Daily Life Study to understand why and how residents in the region travel in their daily lives. The goal of the study was to understand how our region's transportation systems work for the people who live here. Many participants noted that they enjoyed the focus groups conducted by project staff and requested more opportunities to share their experiences in the focus group format in the future.

Future studies should continue to work closely with community partners to coordinate focus groups and offer to meet people at times and in places that work well. Future studies should also consider additional social identities. This study, for example, did not have separate focus groups for people who identify as a non-binary gender, or for some larger immigrant communities in the Twin Cities region, most notably Hmong. Although we talked to non-binary and Hmong people, the study could have benefited from them having their own discussion groups.

We greatly appreciate the time and vulnerability of our participants who took part in these focus groups and shared their personal experiences. We hope that the study's findings and policy recommendations have a positive influence on shaping the region's transportation systems going forward.

*I'm a caregiver of my 9-year-old son and elderly (with high medical needs) mother. I also am homeless and jobless currently, so **I greatly appreciate this opportunity to be heard on such an important topic.***

Focus group for people without reliable transportation,
Dakota County