

In fall 2024, SANDAG conducted an Airport Travel Survey to collect post-pandemic data on how people in the San Diego region travel to and from the airport. Residents, visitors, and airport employees were surveyed at the San Diego International Airport and on airport shuttles and buses (including MTS Route 992).

The final survey sample consisted of more than 4,300 air passengers (both residents and visitors), and 600 airport employees. The survey represents a 10% sample of how nearly 44,000 people traveled to the airport on an average day in fall 2024.

SANDAG will use the survey data to inform our work on regional planning initiatives and the Airport Transit Connection project. Improved transit connections to the airport are a key part of the 2025 Regional Plan, our blueprint for enhancing our region's quality of life. Better connected transportation options will make it easier for people to navigate the region and access the airport without relying on a car.



### Survey Details at a Glance



A statistically significant sample of nearly 5,000 survey responses were collected.



Two out of every three departing air passengers are visitors.

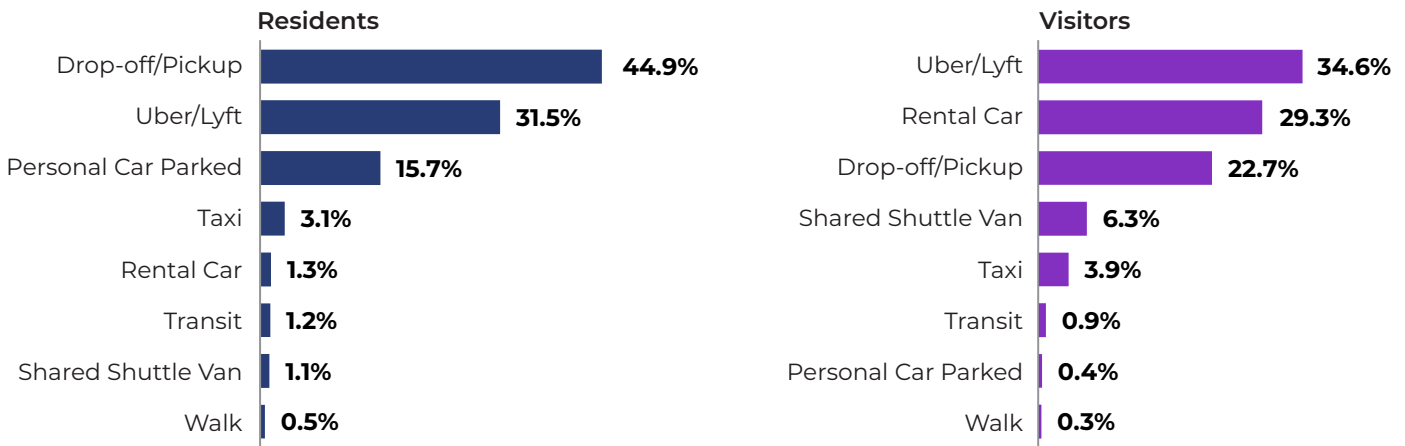


About 10% of airport employees commute to work using transit.

### Departing Air Passengers

Most of the region's residents and visitors get to the airport by car, whether they are dropped off, drive themselves, use a rental car, or take Uber/Lyft (Figure 1).

Figure 1: How Departing Passengers Get to the Airport

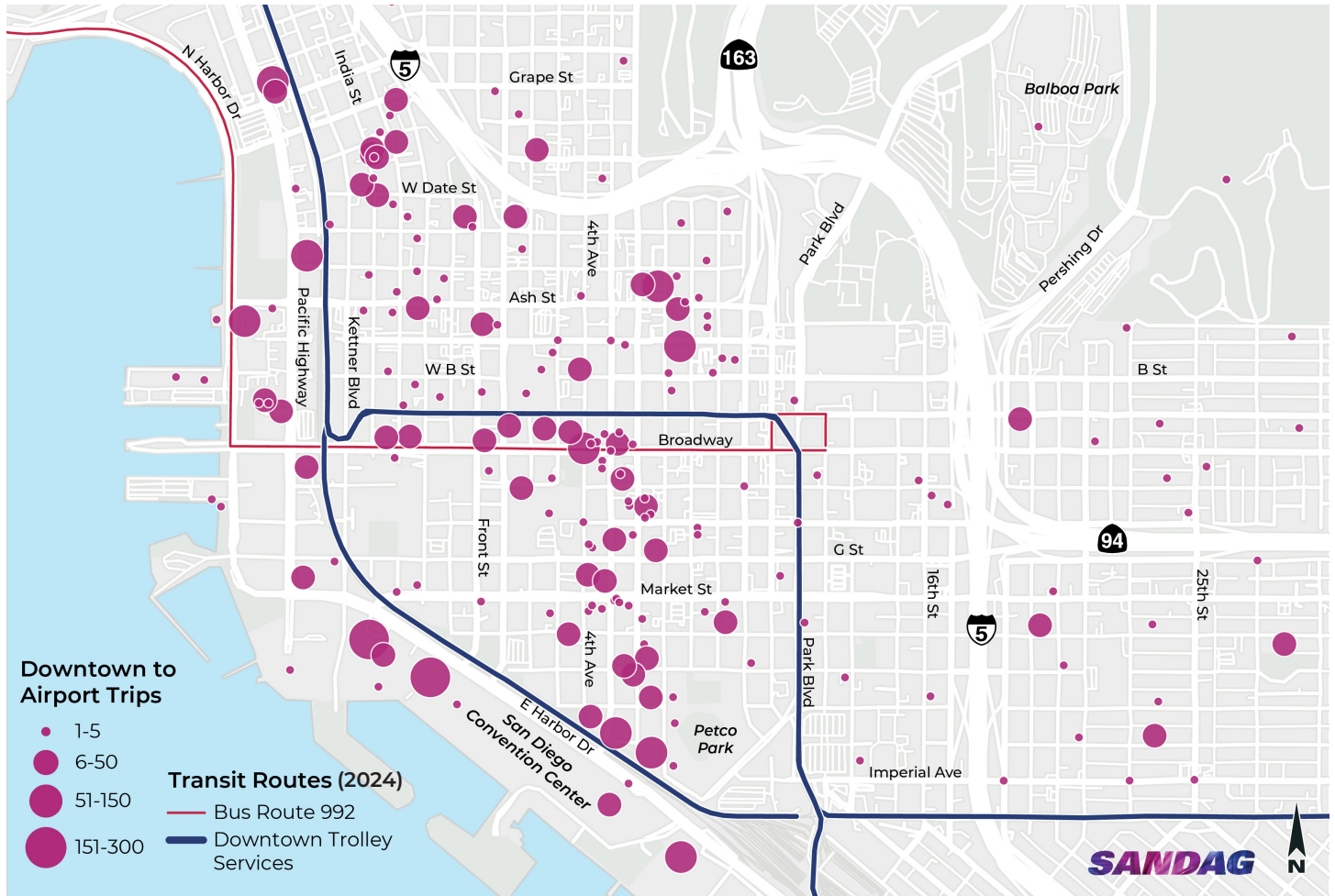


Notes: Walk access may include trips where a drop-off or pickup may occur slightly off SDIA property. Percentages do not add to 100% due to the exclusion of category "Other".

**Departing Air Passengers (Continued)**

Most airport travelers coming from downtown San Diego choose to take cars, while only 2% of trips to the airport from downtown are made by transit, even though many places downtown are within reach of transit (Figure 2). The map below shows the downtown origins of people traveling to the airport and illustrates the potential demand for better transit between these places and the airport.

**Figure 2: Where Departing Air Passengers Come From in Downtown San Diego**

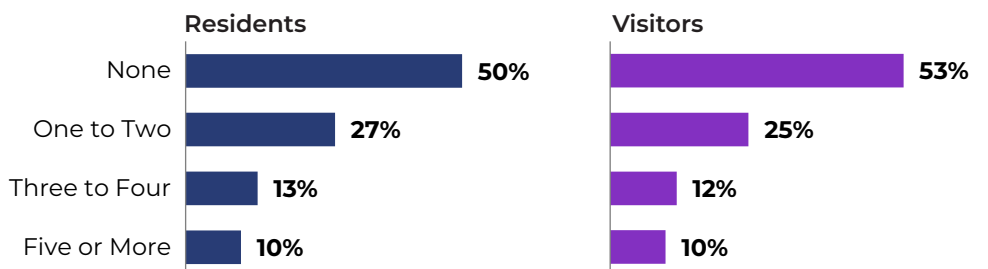


Air passengers are drawn to downtown San Diego for hotels, sporting events, shopping and conventions. About 10% of visitors said the Convention Center was their main destination, with major attractions also including the Embarcadero, Gaslamp Quarter, and Broadway.

**Frequency of Transit Use at Other Airports**

Nearly half of residents and visitors who traveled through other airports within the past year chose transit as their mode of transportation. The travel habits of both groups are similar, with almost a quarter relying on transit three or more times (Figure 3).

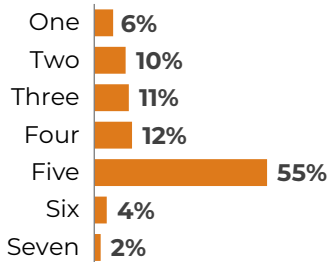
**Figure 3: Number of Times Respondent Used Transit at Other Airports in the Past Year**



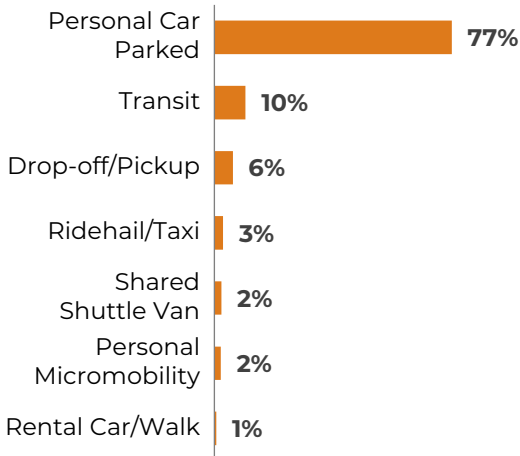
**Airport Employees**

Airport employee commuting patterns are critical for transportation planning. About 60% commute five or more days per week (Figure 4). While most drive (77%), 10% already use transit—far above the regional average of 1.3% (Figure 5). The majority of airport employees travel from the Central, North City, and South Suburban Major Statistical Areas (MSA) (Figure 6).

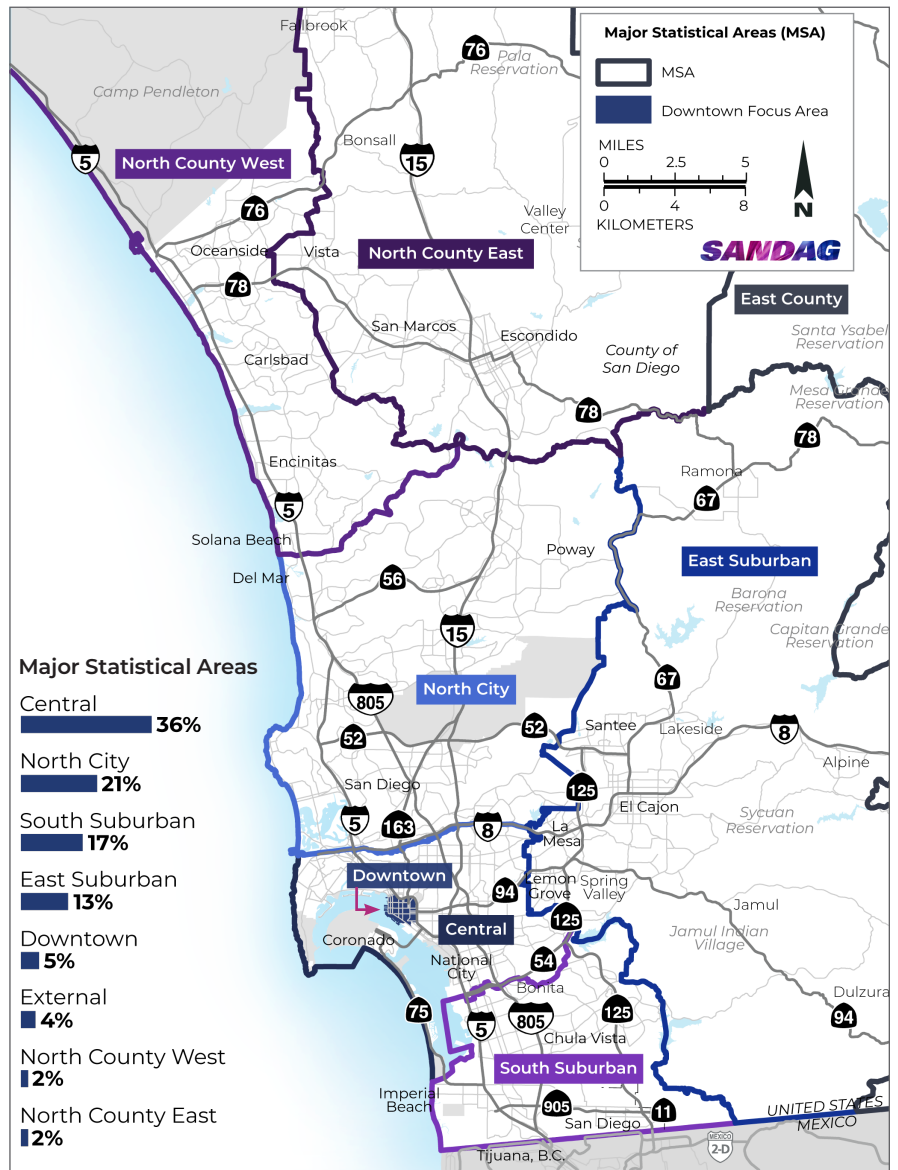
**Figure 4: Number of Days Employees Commute Per Week**



**Figure 5: How Employees Commute to Work**

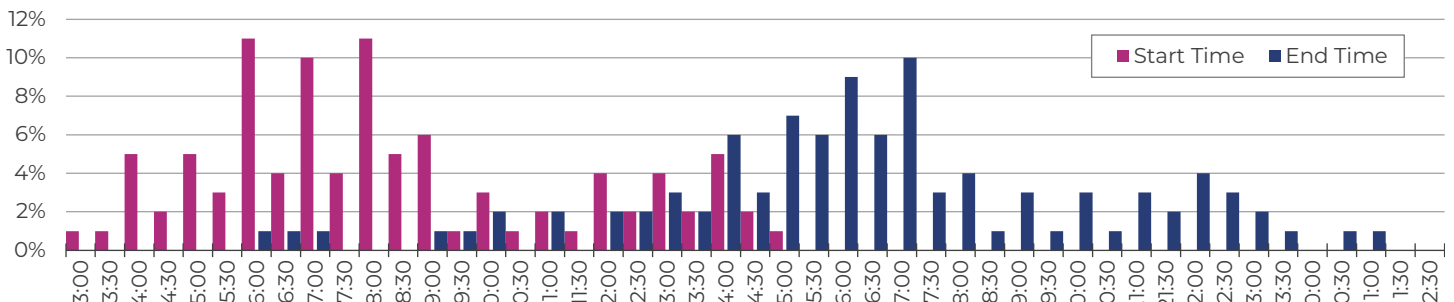


**Figure 6: Where Airport Employees Travel From by Major Statistical Area**



Airport employees work around the clock, with many shifts starting in the early morning or afternoon and ending in the afternoon and evening. Nearly 30% finish work after 6 p.m.—a time when many transit options become less frequent (Figure 7).

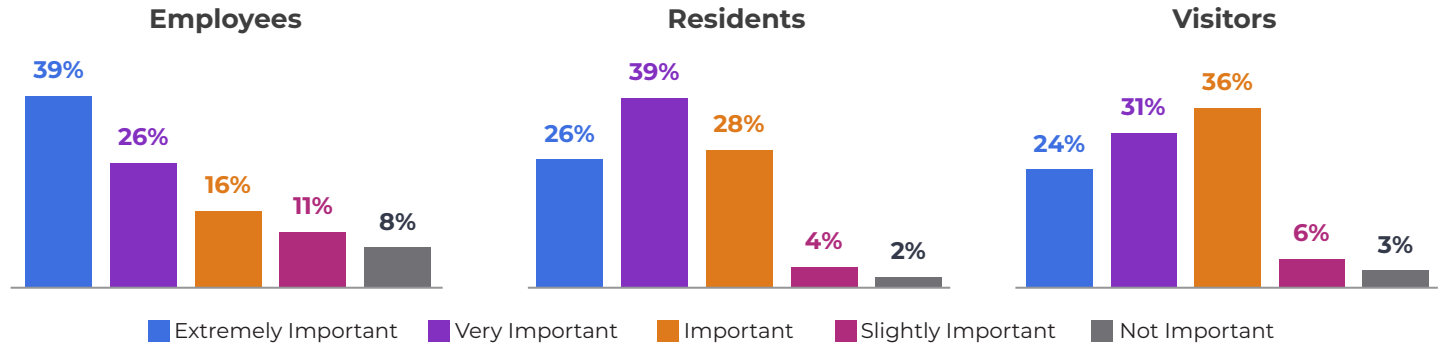
**Figure 7: Employee Shift Start and End Times**



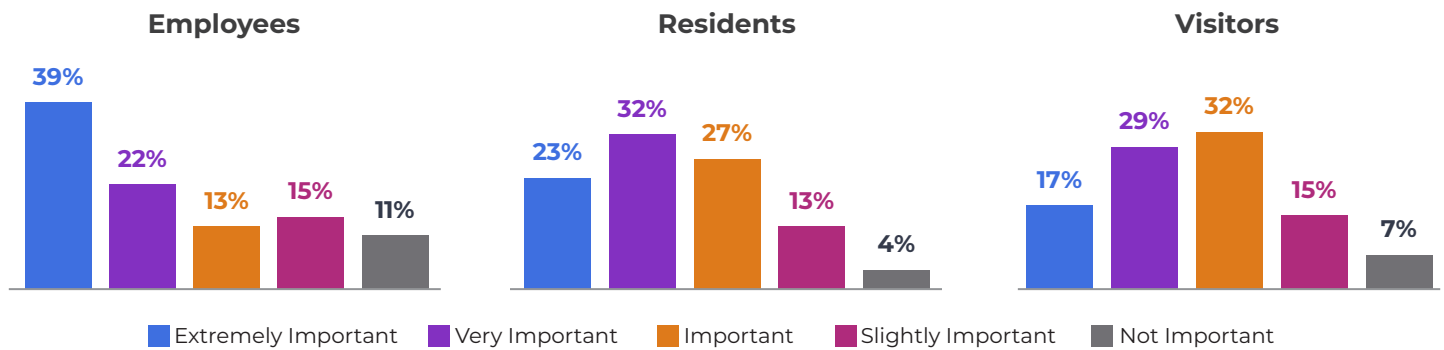
**Transit Preferences**

A subset of respondents were asked what future airport transit improvements they would like to see. Across all groups, weekend and late-night service emerged as top priorities, with nearly 40% of employees rating them “extremely important”. Visitors show a preference for weekend service, while residents value weekend and late-night availability equally (Figures 8, 9).

**Figure 8: How Important is Weekend Transit Frequency?**



**Figure 9: How Important is Late Night Transit Frequency?**



**Takeaways**

- » Insights from this survey will help guide planning and implementation of improved transit connections to the airport. This survey also helps regional partners, including the San Diego International Airport and San Diego Metropolitan Transit System (MTS), plan for the future.
- » To create better airport transit connections, we must consider the unique needs of residents, visitors, and employees. The survey results show clear demand for better airport transit to help employees get to work, residents connect to transit options, and visitors reach popular destinations and events.

**About SANDAG InfoBits**

SANDAG serves as the region’s clearinghouse for information and data. InfoBits publish timely, relevant information to the public while providing context on complex issues facing the region.

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