

In the spring and fall of 2023, the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG), with consultant support from ETC Institute, conducted a comprehensive region-wide Origin and Destination (OD) On-Board Transit Passenger Survey of all San Diego Metropolitan Transit System (MTS) and North County Transit District (NCTD) fixed routes. An On-to-Off (O2O) count was also performed, assessing specific boarding and alighting locations for bus and rail services. The OD survey was conducted to gather detailed travel behavior data, demographic characteristics of riders, travel patterns and usage rates among transit riders. This survey serves multiple mandated requirements including compliance with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) requirements under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, development of customer profiles for transit planning and marketing, and provision of baseline data for future transit system assessments—specifically for evaluating the impacts of the Mid-Coast Blue Line Trolley extension. The 2023 On-Board Transit Passenger Survey report and appendices are available upon request. Please contact us at data@sandag.org. This InfoBits highlights findings from the surveys.

Who are the public transit passengers?

Public transportation is a key resource in the San Diego region, catering to a diverse population that includes students, individuals without vehicles, lower-income households and those who choose to use transit. Survey findings indicate that more than half of transit riders are male (57%) and 28% are students. Young adults aged 18 to 24 represent over a quarter of riders (27%), while 67% are between 18 and 44. Two-thirds (66%) of riders are currently employed, with nearly half (47%) working full-time (Figure 1). According to SANDAG's 2022 population estimates, 6% of households in the region earn less than \$15,000 annually, while survey data shows that 18% of transit users are in this income group (Figure 2). Another 18% of riders have an annual household income of \$15,000 to \$29,999.

Figure 1: TRANSIT RIDER DEMOGRAPHICS

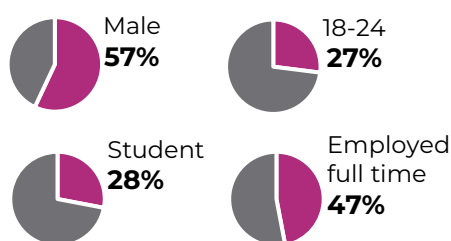
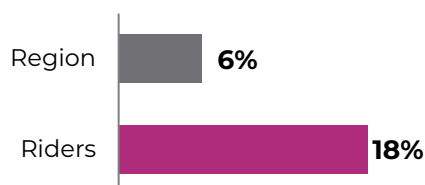
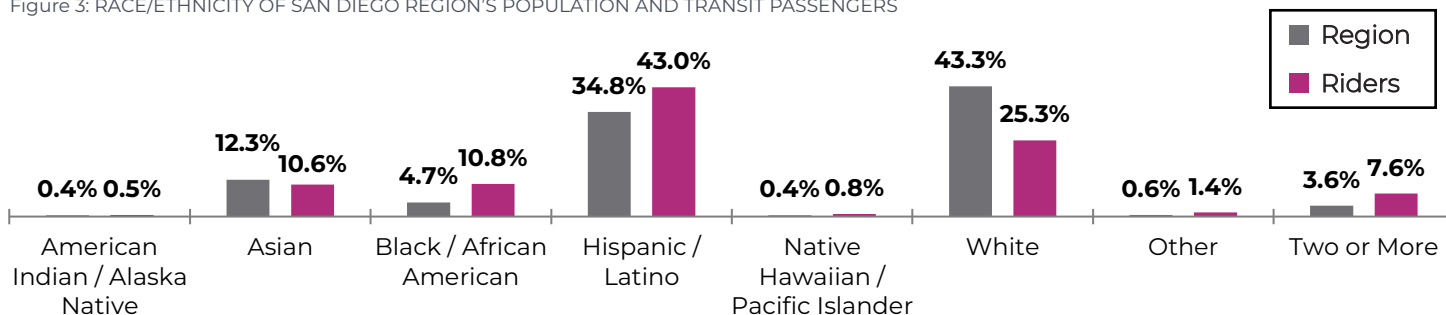


Figure 2: HOUSEHOLDS WITH ANNUAL INCOME LESS THAN \$15,000



Hispanic / Latino passengers make up 43% of transit riders according to survey data, exceeding the region's population share of 35%. Eleven percent of passengers identify as Black / African American, more than double the region's population share of 5%. This disparity suggests that the region's historically underserved population relies on public transit at disproportionately higher rates (Figure 3). Language diversity is notable, as half of riders speak a language other than English at home, and 83% reported speaking English "very well" or "well."

Figure 3: RACE/ETHNICITY OF SAN DIEGO REGION'S POPULATION AND TRANSIT PASSENGERS



Did you know?



85% of riders walk to transit and 86% walk from transit



18% of all trips are to educational institutions



38% of riders do not have a household vehicle

Transit riders travel behavior

More than one third of transit trip types is home/work (35%). Trips begin at home or work and ends at home or work, followed by home-other (23%) and home-school (16%) (Figure 4). Additionally, local transit provides a service to cross border travelers, with 11% of riders reporting that they live in Mexico, with work purposes accounting for 34% of trips.

Four out of five riders travel alone and walk to and from transit stops, while three out of five (63%) did not require any transfers to reach their destination. Almost half (47%) of passengers do not have a driver's license (Figure 5) and nearly 40% do not have a household vehicle. Of those with a household vehicle, 41% could have used it for the current trip, but used transit instead, potentially replacing over 57,000 vehicle trips on an average day. More than one third (34%) of current riders did not use transit before COVID-19. Ridership frequency increased post-pandemic with 36% of passengers using the service five days a week and 13% utilizing it seven days a week (Figure 6), reflecting a growing market of residents who utilize public transportation for their everyday mobility.

Prior to the launch of the Mid-Coast Blue Line Transit project in 2021, almost half (48%) of the route's passengers used other modes to make the trip to the areas covered by the trolley extension. The top three reasons riders cited for choosing the Mid-Coast line were cost (33%), time (31%) and reliability (15%). The data highlights the need for additional cost-competitive, reliable and convenient public transit options, which offer an alternative to rising fuel costs and travel time lost to vehicle congestion.

More than two thirds (69%) of commuters rate local transit as good, which indicates a generally positive view of the quality, convenience and reliability of the system. About one third of riders rated the system as average or poor, suggesting there is room for improvement (Figure 7).

Takeaways

- » Public transit is important to the region's economy.
- » Public transit provides a needed service to residents with lower incomes, without access to vehicles, historically underserved communities and students.
- » Public transit is important to education in the region.
- » Public transit helps to reduce vehicle miles traveled and emissions.

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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Figure 4: TRIP ORIGIN AND DESTINATION LOCATIONS

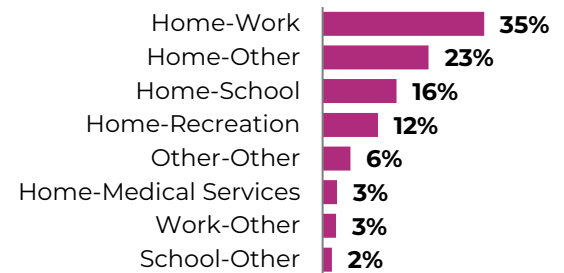


Figure 5: DRIVER'S LICENSE STATUS



Figure 6: TRANSIT USE FREQUENCY, PRE-COVID AND 2023

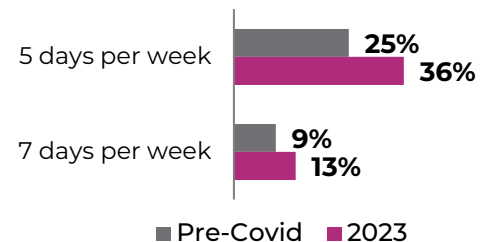
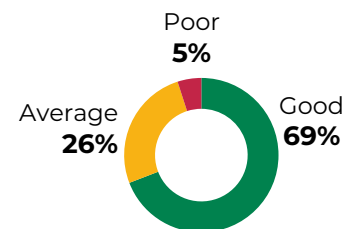


Figure 7: RIDER SATISFACTION RATING



Youth Opportunity Pass (YOP)

YOP was launched in May 2022 and has provided over 30 million free transit rides to San Diego County youth age 6 to 18 on MTS and NCTD services. Seven percent of PRONTO fares were YOP. More information about the program is available on SANDAG's Open Data Portal at [SANDAG.org/yop](https://www.sandag.org/yop).

