

# Connecting the Dots for Regional Transportation

*Qualitative Insights from  
Residents of Snohomish, Pierce,  
Kitsap, and King Counties*

*Winter 2021/2022*



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# Introduction

In December 2021, The Vida Agency hosted five (5) focus groups on behalf of the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) to glean insights and personal testimonies about our region's transportation system, and to inform implementation of the Regional Transportation Plan.

## Research Goals

Through the focus groups, we sought to explore the needs of individuals using our regional transportation system, particularly related to how residents would prefer to get around if improvements were made in the right places. Our primary research goal was to capture personal statements and insight on:

1. Specific (personal) current and anticipated needs from our transportation system.
2. Current barriers to regional transportation.
3. Opportunities to improve daily travel (ease of use, safety, commute time, convenience, features).
4. What a "reliable and well-maintained road" means to participants, and what elements they see are missing currently.
5. What a "reliable transit system" means to participants, and what elements they see are missing currently.
6. What a safe transportation system looks like to participants, and what elements they see are missing currently.

## Approach

We hosted five (5) virtual community focus groups: one focused on each county served by PSRC (King, Kitsap, Pierce, and Snohomish), and one focused on young adults (ages 18-25). 15-minutes prior to each session, participants who desired tech assistance were provided with one-on-one support to get logged in and prepared to participate. After each session, community participants were compensated with \$125 for their time and insights.

## Recruitment

**Priority Participants:** Our engagement effort focused on hard to reach and underrepresented groups, including BIPOC populations, younger adults, and adults with disabilities. Focus groups covered the four-county area (King, Kitsap, Pierce, and Snohomish counties), with efforts to ensure a mix of representation from rural, suburban, and urban residents. To reach our priority participants, we:

- Implemented an email campaign strategy to reach past PSRC focus group participants as well as community organizations that serve our priority groups.
- Created flyers with focus group session information and distributed them in community hubs throughout the four-county area.
- Posted social media content with session information on Instagram and LinkedIn.

Interested community members registered through an online form, and we confirmed participants after an initial screening. 174 individuals registered to participate (“registrants”) through an online form, providing initial input on their experience and access to various modes of transit.

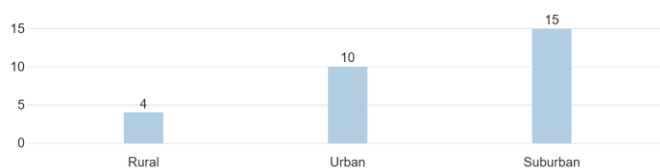
- 74% of interested subjects were from King County, 14% from Pierce County, 7% from Kitsap County, and 5% from Snohomish.
- Most respondents were Black (55%), White (28%), or Hispanic/Latino (10%), with 15% who identified with two more races or ethnicities.
- Most registrants identified as women (a roughly 3:1 ratio with those identifying as men.)
- Most registrants (80%) were under 35 years old, with 26% between 18 and 25.
- 59% live with a child under the age of 18.



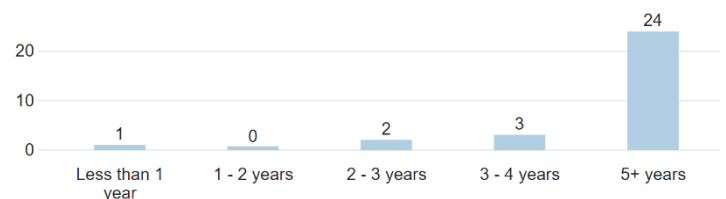
## Participants

Based on priority participant descriptors and to ensure representation from all four counties, 44 individuals were invited to participate in a focus group. Ultimately, 30 individuals participated (“participants”). In the charts below, you can see demographics of participants.

*Participant Neighborhood Type*

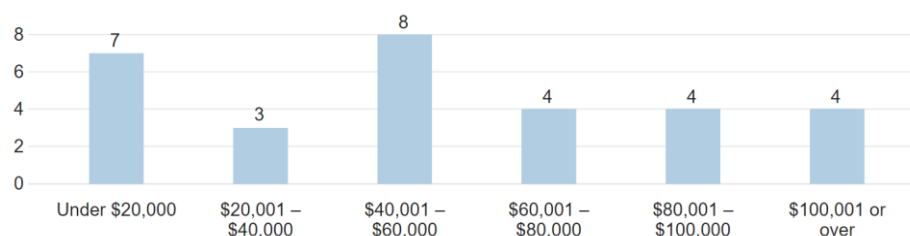


*Participant Length of Residency in Washington State*



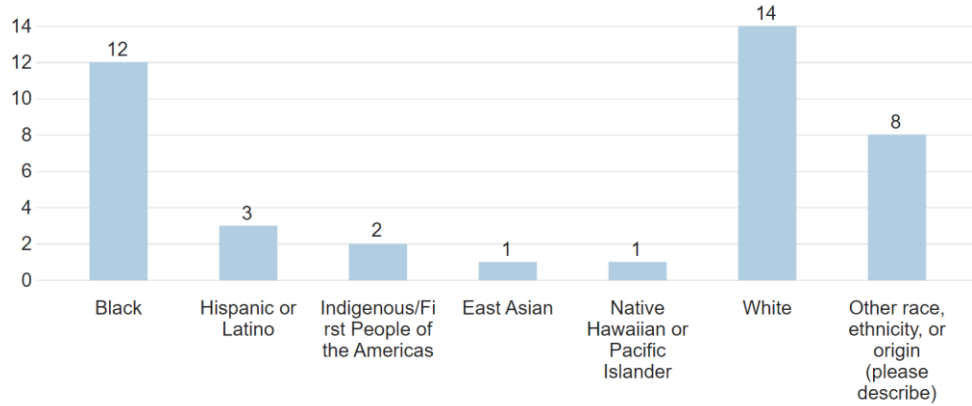
Note: one participant did not respond to this question

*Participant Household Income*

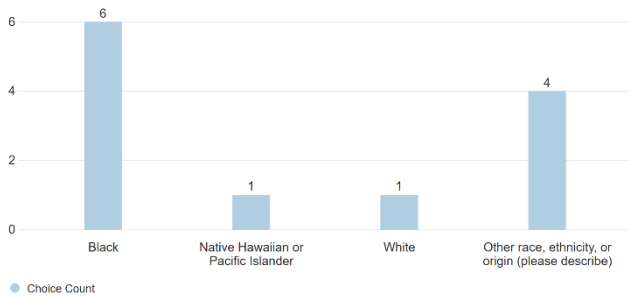


## Participant Race and Ethnicity

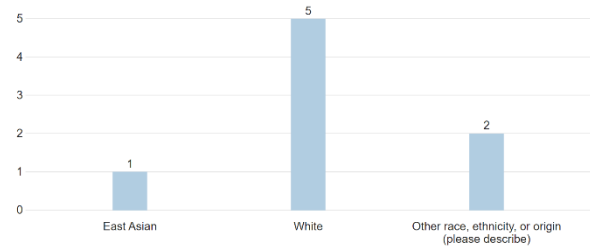
Note: for all race and ethnicity charts, people of two or more races or ethnicities are counted multiple times



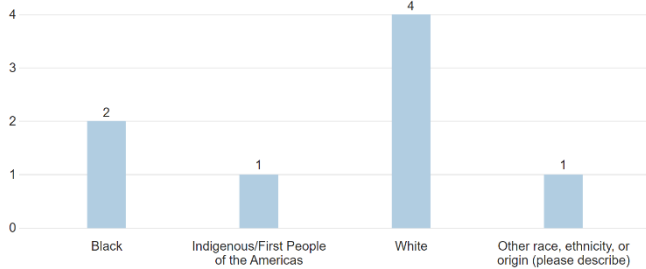
### King County Participants



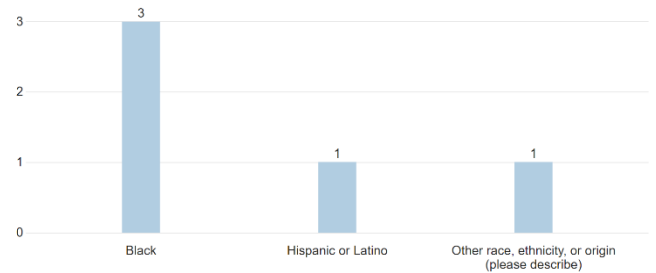
### Kitsap County Participants



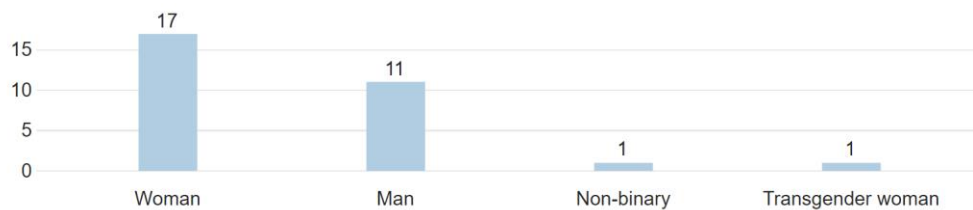
### Pierce County Participants

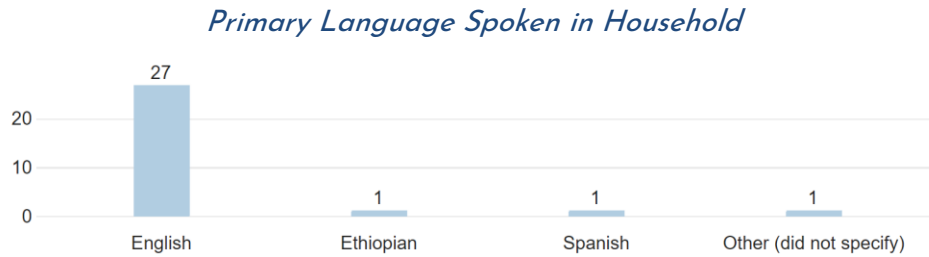
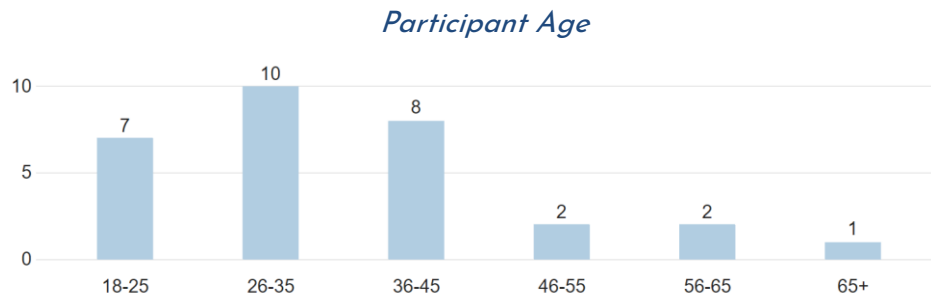


### Snohomish County Participants



## Participant Gender





## Key Findings

The draft 2022 Regional Transportation Plan aims to ensure that our region has “a sustainable, equitable, affordable, safe, and efficient multimodal transportation system, with specific emphasis on an integrated regional transit network that supports the Regional Growth Strategy and promotes vitality of the economy, environment, and health” (10). Focus group participants reflected on key barriers to access, equity, safety, and mobility, and made recommendations about how to address gaps in the transportation system to achieve the above stated goals.

## Reducing Commute Times

For many participants, coordinating multi-mode trips across multiple counties on public transit can be difficult to navigate and coordinate, and can add hours to a commute. Participants cited this as a primary reason for driving a single-occupancy vehicle rather than taking transit. They say that better route and timing coordination across jurisdictions, more accessible infrastructure, and extended service hours would help them commute long distances.

*“I have to take four buses just to get to go to donate plasma. I don't think it should take that long... More direct routes to major cities and major hubs would be helpful.” - Pierce County Resident*

*“That ability to have more frequent bus service and it's reliable is the most important... Being able to have [something] like Sound Transit, but be able to implement something that's a more reliable service like bus, rapid transit and various other things.” - Kitsap County Resident*

*“I took the bus very few times because it was pretty arduous. It was a pretty long process to get down [to Seattle]. And so I feel like I've run into a lot of things that don't work.” - Snohomish County Resident*

*“I lived in Tacoma and worked in Kent... And to get from there to one place to another on public transportation was a lot... Because I had to drive to a transit center, get on a train, take another, get on a bus, go up a hill, walk half a mile. So it's like, why would I? Why would I want to do that?” - King County Resident*

## Reducing Use of Single Occupancy Vehicles

The draft 2022 Regional Transportation Plan states that by 2050, “59% of households will be within ½ mile of an integrated high-capacity transit system, and transit ridership is expected to more than triple. The region’s light rail, commuter rail, fast ferry, and bus rapid transit lines will expand into one of the country’s largest high-capacity transit networks, with an emphasis on connecting centers and high-capacity transit station areas” (12).

Generally, focus group participants said they would prefer not to drive in Puget Sound because it can be frustrating, unpredictable, expensive, and time-consuming. However, they still drive because of the unpredictability of public transit options, and because hyper-local pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure is incomplete or unsafe to use for travel to transit.

*“If I want to go down to Auburn, it's like two-and-a-half hours [via transit], [whereas] you get in the car and it's like 30 minutes, maybe.” - King County Resident*

*“I wish I could get along without a car.” - Kitsap County Resident*

*“I end up just choosing to drive because it's more convenient and it's just easier for me to navigate.” - Snohomish County Resident*

Many participants felt that when they walk, bike, or roll, they are competing against cars on the roadway. They noted that our current transportation system is designed for ease of driving, and that other modes are forced to maneuver around drivers, posing numerous safety risks. Even where infrastructure exists to support other modes, many commented that drivers simply ignore signage, sidewalks, barriers, or crosswalks.

*“As a pedestrian, it's still sometimes difficult to compete with cars and other vehicles for space.” - Young Adult Participant*

*“Cars seem like a default, and that makes it difficult for folks without cars.” - Kitsap County Resident*

*“I can't tell you how many times I've almost gotten hit when I'm in the crosswalk. And I'm going because they're telling me it's now time for me to be able to cross. And people are just not aware.” - Kitsap County Participant*

Participants noted that to enable a mode shift away from single-occupancy vehicles, the region must think beyond expanding transit stations and stops, and prioritize the half mile between stations and nearby residences. If there’s a transit station within a half mile of their home, but they have no sidewalks, crosswalks, or well-lit pathways between



their home and that station, or no covered area to stay dry while they wait for their bus, participants say they would still drive a car to their final destination.

*“They spread out the crosswalks so that it's two or three gigantic mega-blocks... So your options are to walk way out of your way to get to a crosswalk and then walk back, or what most people do, which is to dart across seven lanes of traffic at a corner.” - Snohomish County Resident*

*“There's a lot of these bus stops along the route that don't have a shelter. So you're standing out and pouring down rain, waiting for the bus to show up... if there's more shelters available that would really help out a lot.” - Pierce County Resident*

*“I would like to walk more. I currently bus to get to work and as many places as I can, but I also own a car and drive to more far-flung locales... but I'd love to walk more as possible.” - King County Resident*

## Connecting Pedestrian Pathways

Generally, participants agreed on the importance of pedestrian infrastructure, including maintenance and connections within and across neighborhoods, lighting, signage, seating, and separation between different modes of traffic. They noted that sidewalks often have cracks, roots breaking through the concrete, slippery leaf coverage, missing curb ramps, and gaps in connectivity. If the region developed and maintained a network of trails and sidewalks, participants say they would walk more to local destinations and transit.

*“The sidewalks in my neighborhood are great. Unfortunately, there are no sidewalks to connect us to other parts of the city.” - Pierce County Resident*

*“I walk an average of six to nine miles a day, there needs to be more sidewalks on streets there, [there are] not very many sidewalks unless you're strolling the main street in town. I enjoy walking in a safe place.” - King County Resident*

*“I end up being in the street because the sidewalks are not completely passable... There are still blocks that don't have sidewalks at all, or the cutouts are old.” - Kitsap County Resident*

*“My best case scenario would be having more walkable communities. I live in North Everett, and it's nice because I can walk a lot of places, but it is somewhat challenging to walk very far because you get to a point where there aren't going to be sidewalks or you're on a really busy street. And so finding ways to incorporate walking options and biking options and in just a safer way, that's mainly the reason why I don't walk as many places as I could.” - Snohomish County Resident*

*“There are some areas around where I live, where there aren't even any sidewalks at all. It's a very narrow strip between you and the traffic... you reach out your arm and probably get whacked off by a car on the way.” - Pierce County Resident*

*“In some parts of the city here, there's trees that are growing, the root systems of the trees have to move out themselves, and it creates these big juts where if you're walking, you're likely to trip... there's some spots where [the shifting of the sidewalks is] pretty pronounced.” - King County Resident*

## Creating Safety

A fifth of registrants (18%) said they don't feel safe getting to and from transit options in their community, and 16% said they don't feel safe while using transit options. Primary safety concerns included:

- **Lack of lighting:** Participants from every county noted a lack of lighting between their home and nearby transit options, as well as around bus stops.
- **Missing pedestrian infrastructure:** Participants noted the need for connected sidewalks (between homes and destinations), crosswalks, and curb ramps so that they can walk safely from their homes to transit stops and other locations within their community.
- **Limited signage:** Signage was mentioned as a safety infrastructure improvement in every discussion except for Pierce County. Participants noted that it can be difficult to find transit stops when signs are absent, overgrown, outdated, lack lighting, or don't include current transit schedules.
- **Lack of options when things go wrong:** Sometimes, a bus is delayed, canceled, arrives after the connecting bus/transit has already departed, or a work shift ends after the last scheduled bus. As a result, participants say they've been stranded at night in a different county than where they live, without reasonably-priced or viable alternative options to get them safely home. They suggested that expanded hours (evening, nights, weekends), phone alerts, mobile apps, schedule coordination across jurisdictions, and work schedule coordination would help to improve safety in those moments.
- **Lack of human assistance or emergency response:** Passengers understood that bus drivers cannot both drive safely and respond to emergency passenger needs. However, several participants had experienced a safety threat or witnessed illegal activity while riding transit, and help was not provided. They say an easily accessible panic button and the presence of public safety liaisons or officers would help to ensure safety for riders.
- **Spread of COVID-19:** Participants shared that they felt unsafe when crowded under small bus stop shelters with other riders waiting for the bus, or when transit isn't clean. They suggested installing larger bus shelter roofs and providing hand and seat sanitizer on transit.

*“I would like to see them expand the hours, running later than what they do in Pierce County. I know in Seattle they run a lot later than they do over here, and it makes it harder for the people that do work at night to maintain their jobs because they can't get home.” - Pierce County Participant*

*“I've had an incident where I didn't feel safe on a bus and the bus driver just kept driving because he had to wait to get to the next stop... It would be nice if there's an incident, if the passengers can push a back panic button of some sort to get some help on the bus.” - Snohomish County Resident*

# Human Infrastructure

The draft 2022 Regional Transportation Plan states that “equity and safety are primary lenses through which transit access improvements should be considered” (31). The Plan primarily considers safety through physical improvements; however, we heard in focus groups that participants also value human infrastructure, an element that does not appear to be addressed in the current draft of the plan.

In every session, participants noted the need for personalized support to help them plan their trips or adapt mid-journey when something goes wrong (31 comments), or to help them respond to an emergency or access need. Primary needs included:

- Real-time support for missed connections between modes or legs of a journey, particularly outside of traditional work hours.
- Mental health crisis support.
- Conflict de-escalation.
- Homeless services and support.
- Safety enforcement.

*“There's issues with mental illness and people act out and you know, there needs to be resources available.” - Kitsap County Participant*

*“There's some kind of security guard that is on the trains all the time [in Portland]. I don't know if that's feasible for our area or not, but that's my main concern about riding on bus and light rail. If there's an issue, how do you get emergency services right away?” - Snohomish County Resident*

*“Having transit ambassadors at the transit stations to help, you know, facilitate things. Ambassadors are huge. I think that could help with customer service.” - Kitsap County Resident*

*“What if they came out with some 24/7 person that could help you with your bus or trying to figure out the bus route because it's very limited right now... After [5 pm], you can't get a hold of anybody to find out what route you might need to take.” - Pierce County Resident*

## Region-Wide Coordination

Participants across all focus groups perceived that coordination between transit agencies and jurisdictions was limited, posing barriers to long-term solutions. Several participants shared that commuting across counties raised concerns of coordinating multiple agency's schedules to align transfers and increased “commuter” fares for bus lines into Seattle. Many participants shared that in more rural areas it can be challenging to plan a time-sensitive commute due to the amount of transfers and waiting between different transit modes.

Some participants also expressed that they didn't know about programs like ORCA that attempt to connect agencies and transit through the region and have reduced fare options. Additional messaging about programs and services available may help reduce the cost burden that some participants feel.

*“Kitsap Transit does a good job of connecting with the ferries, but in Seattle, what I've been told is that ferry riders are such a tiny percentage of either Sound Transit or Metro that they don't care about ferry riders. It's just not worth it to them to bother. But that is a huge problem when you can't somehow connect the two systems.” - Kitsap County Resident*

*“When you have one schedule for one agency and that agency needs, you're required to mesh with other routes and then the other agencies... we also have all this dwell time, and it isn't five minutes or 10 minutes to go to the bathroom, get a coffee, get back on. It's more like half an hour. Forty-five minutes.” - Snohomish County Resident*

*“I would like to see them expand the hours running more later than what they do in Pierce County. I know in Seattle they run a lot later than they do over here, and it makes it harder for the people that do work at night to maintain their jobs because... They can't get home, you know?” - Pierce County Resident*

*“I think people are always asking, like, what bus do I take here? What do I take there?... That's one of the things that make it hard for me to get around... more awareness would probably help people get around better as I see other people have a lot of trouble. What are they supposed to do?” - King County Resident*

## Geographic Key Findings

While many of the above themes were consistent across focus groups, participants also reflected on the unique needs within their county or city. Below, we highlight these key geographic insights, including the topics of most interest participants in each county. Within parenthesis, you'll see the number of times participants from that county mentioned a given topic. For reference, the total number of comments per topic ranged from 0-40.

### Pierce County

In the Pierce County focus group, we heard from participants who live in suburban, urban, and rural environments. Participants in Pierce County were particularly focused on challenges with commuting cross-county for work, and shared a need for additional rail and road infrastructure to handle commuting patterns. Other popular topics in the discussion included road improvements (7 comments), and either safety concerns and safety infrastructure (16 comments).

*“[Highway] 10 is a two-way highway, as well as [Highway] 167. There's just too many commuters for such a small route.” - Pierce County Resident*

Over half of registrants from Pierce County say they feel safe while using transit options in their community (52%), and that they feel safe getting to and from those transit options (54%). However, three (3) indicated they don't feel safe while using transit in Pierce County, and five (5) said they don't feel safe getting to transit.

*“I currently don't really have alternative commute options other than driving.” - Pierce County Resident*

When looking for information on transit, registrants in Pierce County said they go to Google/Apple maps (68%), the official transit app or website (64%), information posted in transit centers/bus stops (25%), paper copies of schedules (11%), and community organizations (7%).

## Kitsap County

In the Kitsap County focus group, we heard from participants who live in urban and suburban environments. Almost everyone in the discussion said they feel safe using transit in their community, however several noted that they don't feel safe getting to and from transit stops.

Participants from Kitsap County were particularly focused on mobility concerns, as several participants in the group regularly use a wheelchair. Discussion focused particularly on sidewalk improvements (12 comments) and bus service access (10 comments). Kitsap County participants were also especially invested in the ferry system as a viable transit option in order to mediate geographical limitations of living on the "island" of the peninsula.

*"Get off the roads and onto the water." - Kitsap County Resident*

*"Moving to Bainbridge specifically to be close to the ferry has been a pretty huge improvement for accessibility to [Seattle]." - Kitsap County Resident*

When looking for information on transit, registrants in Kitsap County said they go to the official transit app or website (5), Google/Apple maps (4), paper copies of schedules (2), information posted in transit centers/bus stops (2), and community organizations (1).

## Snohomish County

In the Snohomish County focus group, we heard from participants who live in suburban and rural environments. The Snohomish County session had the most comments regarding safety concerns (21 comments). While most participants said they feel safe getting to and from transit in their community, several (2) did not feel safe while using transit.

Other popular topics included bus route improvements (16 comments), light rail improvements (10 comments), and cross-county travel (13 comments). Snohomish County participants were particularly interested in exploring workplace implications to their commute, and shared a number of recommendations for employer and employee considerations related to commuting, including hybrid- or work-from-home options, satellite offices, and relocating organizations outside the urban core.

*"I think companies can help with traffic... If they analyze where their workers really are located and if they're located outside an area, perhaps they can have workspaces available for their staff to go to that's near those areas." - Snohomish County Resident*

*"Encouraging some business development in these areas... looking at where more people live and supporting businesses that are opening there, especially businesses that are going to be creating family wage jobs." - Snohomish County Resident*

When looking for information on transit, registrants in Snohomish County said they go to the official transit app or website (5), Google/Apple maps (4), paper copies of schedules (2), information posted in transit centers/bus stops (1), and community organizations (1).

## King County

In the King County focus group, we heard from participants who live in urban, suburban, and rural environments. Participants from King County had the most comments related to human accessibility features (17 comments). Other priority topics included bus reliability (11 comments), access to bus service (15 mentions), as well as safety concerns (15 comments).

*“If I use the bus to go to the doctor, it’s an all-day thing due to the fact of little transportation in my area.” - King County Resident*

Over half of registrants from King County say they feel safe while using transit options in their community (58%), and that they feel safe getting to and from those transit options (57%). However, 17% indicated they don’t feel safe while using transit in King County, and 24% said they don’t feel safe getting to transit.

*“I do have to haul my kids and I have to go take them to their doctor’s appointments, I’m hovering over my kids because it’s not really a safe environment where we have to catch the buses.” – King County Resident*

When looking for information on transit, registrants in King County were more likely to turn to Google/Apple maps, information posted in transit centers/bus stops, or paper copies of schedules than those from other counties. They said they go to Google/Apple maps (77%), the official transit app or website (56%), information posted in transit centers/bus stops (21%), paper copies of schedules (14%), or community organizations (3%) when they need information.

## Reality of Long Commutes

The draft Regional Transportation Plan noted that a top mobility challenge for residents is long travel times, and that a top motivator to get people to use more regular transit is shorter trip times. Many participants agreed, sharing experiences with commutes that are long (time), cross-counties or transit jurisdictions (distance), or multi-mode (complexity). They noted challenges with trip planning and unreliable commute times, citing scheduling misalignment across jurisdictions and traffic as key barriers.

*“Before the pandemic, and when I lived in Lynnwood and commuting to downtown Seattle, it would usually take me every Friday about an hour and a half or two hours to get to and back from home. And it was all because of traffic.” - Snohomish County Resident*

*“When I lived in the city, it still took me an hour to get to work... I was on South Beacon Hill and needed to go downtown Seattle. It still took a long time to get there. So there’s other things going on besides housing, although that is one factor.” - Snohomish County Resident*

*"I get off at 5:40. My next bus comes out at 5:47, but it's probably going to be late as usual and I'm not going to get home until 8 pm or 7:30... I always lose a huge amount of time in my day just traveling on the bus." - Young Adult Participant*

Particularly for participants who live and work in different counties, difficulty and length of time to take multiple modes to reach their destination was a key barrier to reducing single-occupancy vehicle use.

*"When I first moved here, I lived in Gig Harbor and I worked in Tacoma... Going down, I had to leave three hours earlier because there were not a lot of buses that go out there... I spent basically my entire day to and from work, at work, and sleeping. It was like all I did and it made it difficult, which is why after that, I always made sure I had a car." - King County Resident*

*"I lived in Tacoma and worked in Kent... And to get from there to one place to another on public transportation was a lot... Because I had to drive to a transit center, get on a train, take another, get on a bus, go up a hill, walk half a mile. So it's like, why would I? Why would I want to do that?" - King County Resident*

Most participants who shared their long commutes agreed that those experiences negatively impacted other factors of their lives, especially when it comes to their families and work-life balance.

*"You don't have that time to help your kid with their homework. You don't have the time to sit down with your family for dinner. You don't have time to do any number of things that you would, or just physically being there so that the people that you care about see you more and know you're there... Just your presence, knowing that you're in the other room, can make a big difference." - King County Resident*

*"I feel bad even though my kids are a little older, I get less time with my children and it sucks. We love family time and being able to eat together and most nights we don't get to because of the time of the bus route. I have two special needs kiddos and they need more time and I don't have the opportunity because of transportation." - King County Resident*

During 2021 focus groups conducted by The Vida Agency for PSRC's Regional Housing Needs Assessment, participants noted similar concerns related to the real cost of commuting on their health, finances, careers, families, communities, and environment. An excerpt from that finding report has been included in **Appendix A** with related insights.

*"There's a lot of energy to get People of Color to care about plastic bags. But if we could afford to live fifteen minutes from work it would lower our carbon footprint more than anything." - Regional Housing Focus Group Participant*

*"I'm up in the morning and it's dark, I come back and it's dark, and the only thing you can do is eat, sleep, and shit." - Regional Housing Focus Group Participant*

# Integrated Approach to Multimodal System

In the month prior to the focus groups, participants say their preferred modes of transportation were bus/transit (66%), walking/rolling (60%), single occupancy vehicle (53%), light rail (43%), and ferry (30%).

When asked whether they plan to commute for work in the coming year, most participants (83%) said “yes,” with 48% of those respondents planning to work in-person every day (12), and 52% of respondents planning to work in-person a few days a week (13).

## Regular Transit

In focus groups, participants reflected on their experience with transit in their community, noting key barriers and opportunities to extend service.

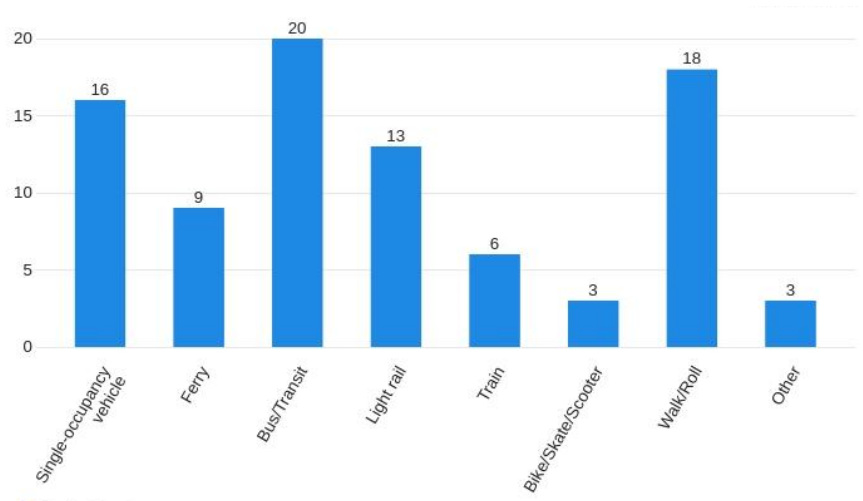
### Buses

In the month prior to the focus groups, 66% of participants (20) say they used bus or transit as their primary mode. They primarily use buses for getting to recreational and leisure activities (66%), commuting to work (63%), running errands or to reach appointments (63%), and visiting friends and family (53%).

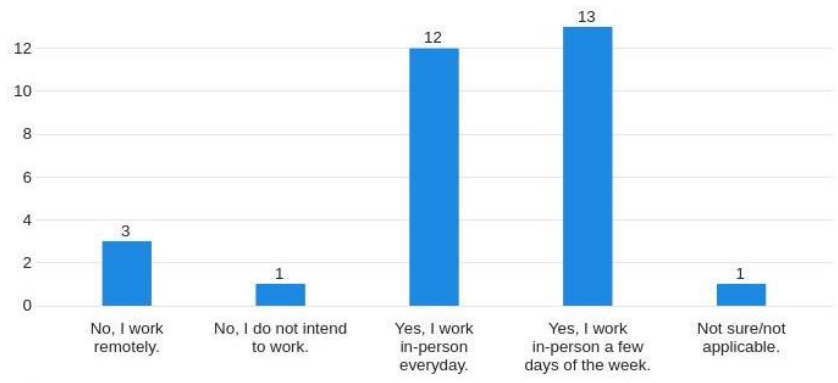
### Experience

Several participants expressed challenges using buses because of issues coordinating schedules and allocating enough time to navigate the bus system.

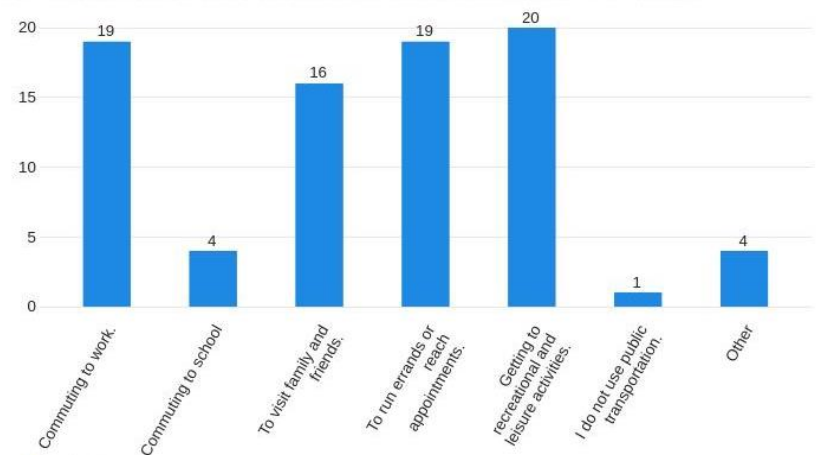
*Mode(s) of transportation most used in the past month*



*Do you anticipate commuting to work in the next year?*



*When Participants Ride the Bus*





*"If I use the bus to go to the doctor, it's an all-day thing due to the fact of little transportation in my area." - King County Resident*

*"There have been several times when I've thought, 'it would be great to take [the local dial-a-ride service] to such and such a place.' And then I realized, 'well, it's not going to work because I'd have to be finished and back home by three' and that's just not very useful." - Kitsap County Resident*

Inconsistent bus arrival times throughout the region was a primary concern, and participants expressed frustration over the time lost due to transfers and waiting for the next bus to arrive. (The topic of transfers is explored more in "Wayfinding and Trip Planning").

*"I cannot afford to be wasting 20 minutes here and then an hour here and then 30 minutes here of my day... You can't be working on something else while you're just standing out in the rain hoping that a bus comes." - Kitsap County Resident*

*"In Seattle, the buses come as quickly as they can and I think my experience is generally that they do come eventually, but sometimes it's five minutes in-between and sometimes it's 45 minutes in-between when it's supposed to be every 15 or 30 minute thing." - Young Adult Participant*

*"We have the bus system, but it's so cumbersome and time consuming to get from place to place. I had a meeting from 1 - 3 pm in Silverdale. I caught the bus on the island at 9:15... but I didn't get home until 5:00, so it literally took me the whole day to get to and from a two hour meeting." - Kitsap County Participant*

## Key Barriers

We heard repeatedly that there aren't enough bus routes running that connect the region (especially between counties), and that participants generally found it challenging to get from rural areas to central transit centers.

*"I live way back in a residential part and the buses rarely come back here, so I literally have to go to a main road to catch my bus. So I think that would probably be something that I would prefer instead of having to literally run or haul my kids to the main street and then catch a bus." - King County Resident*

*"It is really hard to go from county to county... and that's really limiting for people." - Kitsap County Resident*

*"I've had to walk two hours back home because the buses stop running early or there are few bus stops on that route." - Young Adult Participant*

Several participants noted that bus stops are not easily accessible; in more rural areas, many participants shared that they had to travel several miles to reach a bus stop or transit center. These participants shared that infrequent bus

service at those limited sites was also an obstacle in using bus services, as it makes overall trips longer than if they were to drive a single occupancy vehicle.

*“It's really annoying having to take three to four buses just to get to one place, and that's just on the way there. And then you factor in going back, traffic, and if one bus is late, then ... you're kind of screwed. There's nothing you can do.” - Young Adult Participant*

*“The worst thing that usually happens is I go into the store and buy groceries and then I try to catch the bus. And sometimes I just miss it and I have to sit there in the sun or in the rain and just wait for another 30-40 minutes until another bus comes.” - King County Resident*

*“There's definitely certain areas where there's little to no bus stops. And it's hard to get to those bus stops without having to take an Uber or Lyft.” - Young Adult Participant*

Other participants shared that bus stop accessibility issues stem from drivers leaving too early or not waiting for riders who might be a few seconds behind schedule.

*“I think people literally running for the bus just seems careless. I don't think waiting two three minutes would hurt.” - King County Resident*

*“Bus drivers take off a lot... They don't wait for people or they just pass by the bus stop.” - Pierce County Resident*

Most participants regularly use the bus to commute to work or to get around their neighborhoods. For those who work non-standard hours, they reported that their experience using the bus was not as robust during weekends and evening hours, sometimes making it hard for them to get home at the end of a shift.

*“Transportation investments shouldn't focus solely on peak times. A lot of people rely on transit at all times of day, especially if they have long commutes - Young Adult Participant*

*“People do work on weekends and just because they may not work on weekends, they still have errands and recreational activities to get to.” - Young Adult Participant*

*“The weekends are detrimental to travel as the schedule completely changes Saturday and changes again on Sundays. Very inconvenient.” - Young Adult Participant*

## Improvements

In every focus group, participants expressed a need for broader, more frequent access to buses, especially in the case of cross-county commutes. Participants generally viewed these connection points between regional service into more metropolitan regions as a bottleneck.

*"Making it easier to get around would be buses running more often or buses aligning with each other, especially if it's a common area people are going." - Pierce County Resident*

*"They should have more buses that commute in areas that's further out by the mountains. I feel like that'll be very helpful because usually when we're going somewhere ... we have to park our car and then catch a bus." - King County Resident*

Participants who identified as commuters suggested developing dedicated bus lanes, both on highways and intercity, in order to remove buses from single occupancy vehicle traffic.

*"Having lanes exclusively for buses, and prioritizing those commutes so that there is an option that can still run with some level of consistency and reliability... [where] the buses are separated out from other people commuting and single occupancy vehicles" - Pierce County Resident*

*"Creating specified bus routes and lanes (like we have express lanes in HOV) to help reduce the duration." - King County Resident*

*"If buses were faster than single occupancy that would improve commuting significantly because people would opt to use buses." - Pierce County Resident*

*"If there's a bus only lane and cars are actually respecting the bus only lane, then that can make your trip a lot more smooth and on schedule than if you're also stuck with all the other cars in a pile up on I-5." - Young Adult Participant*

## Link Light Rail

In the month prior to the focus groups, 43% of participants (13) say they used bus or transit as their primary mode.

### Experience

Not all participants have access to light rail in their community, but those who do generally viewed it as a helpful addition to their commute when combined with other modes of travel.

*"The light rail isn't in my neighborhood, but has been helpful to combine with bus busing and walking." - Young Adult Participant*

*"I definitely use a light rail, and it's quick and it's easy, and it seems to run fairly late... It's super convenient because it just goes pretty quick between places. Having more of it on the horizon is definitely good." - King County Resident*

*"It's made it a lot easier, where I can just go downtown and I can catch the light rail from there all the way to Northgate. And then there's an express bus that runs all the time from Northgate to Everett, and then it's just a hop skip and a jump, Marysville. So it's like*

*three connections but it's just that direct link from downtown to Northgate, which normally on a bus takes forever to get there.” - King County Resident*

Several participants were particularly excited about light rail expansions and expressed strong support for further expansion. We heard this excitement particularly from those along the current planned light rail stops, which may indicate a positive perception to the overall light rail expansion.

*“I can't wait till [light rail] gets to Lynnwood. I feel it's really going to alleviate the traffic problems.” - Snohomish County Resident*

*“[We need] funding to finish the light rail as soon as possible.” - Snohomish County Resident*

*“I would love for the light rail to be in Everett tomorrow. I just think it would solve a lot of problems if we had access to it sooner rather than later.” - Snohomish County Resident*

*“I wish I could use light rail to get to work. We don't have light rails in Auburn.” - King County Resident*

## Key Barriers and Improvements

The fundamental barrier that participants shared centered around limited light rail access and options. Continuing to expand light rail routes and backfill stops may help alleviate this barrier. A few participants shared concerns about the current expansion plan, worrying that it is not enough for regional needs.

*“I would love to see the light rail working 24/7. That would be very helpful to be able to go to Seattle and Tukwila at any point.” - Pierce County Resident*

*“Renton can Auburn and further south are being left out at this time of the light rail option.” - Pierce County Resident*

*“Since I have to get around a lot, I would prefer something like... light rail. That would be my main choice.” - Snohomish County Resident*

*“I think that frequency could be increased, but getting up to the east side [e.g., Bellevue] is the complex part.” - Pierce County Resident*

## Expanding Rail

The draft 2022 Regional Transportation Plan notes that “continued population growth in the region is expected to fuel demand for passenger rail service” (45). Many focus group participants said they would like to have additional rail options in their commutes. Participants did not differentiate between light rail, conventional rail, or high-speed rail in conversations.

Participants who live in proximity to a passenger rail option noted that it can be challenging to connect their starting point to the rail station. For example, we heard from participants in Snohomish County that the Edmonds Station can be awkward to access since Edmonds is not a central location in the county. We also heard that the nearest light rail station (Northgate) required a bus transfer or a car commute to be accessible. Participants who don't live near a rail option expressed frustration in long-term planning that they feel is not including their neighborhoods. Some participants in Pierce County felt that they were being left out of the current Link Light Rail expansion, while one participant in Kitsap County stated that "we're never going to have a light rail in Kitsap County."

To address these barriers, participants generally agreed that increased frequency and connectivity, easier transfer integration, and continued prioritization of expanded rail options in long-term planning endeavors would satiate their demand for more passenger rail service.

*"Amtrak Cascades is so infrequent that we could really use more regional rail." - Snohomish County Resident*

*"My dream vision in our region would be to have a lot more train options. I currently commute to Bellevue Monday through Friday for work, so it's a lot of driving and it would be great to have alternative options. I currently don't really have alternative commute options other than driving." - Pierce County Resident*

*"I do love the Sounder and wish it ran more often. I think that would be so great for a day trip down to Seattle. And I think I think I would actually go down there more often than I do, because right now I almost never go." - Snohomish County Resident*

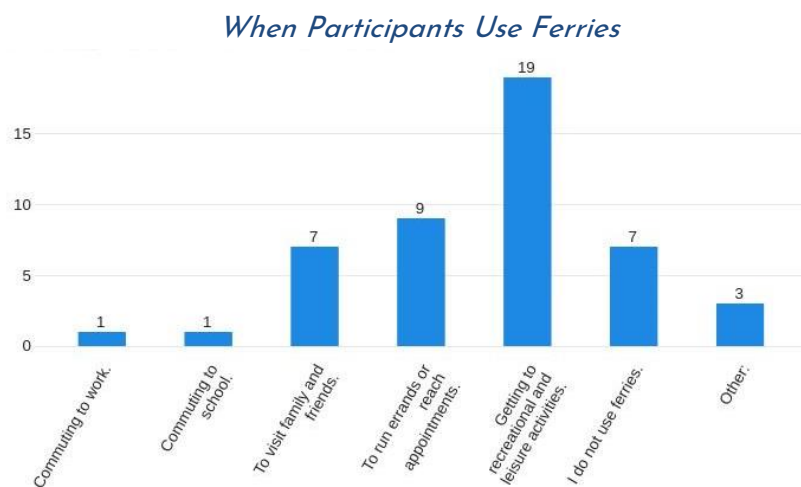
*"If we had more Sounder trains running from Tacoma or from Lakewood to Seattle, that would be nice because they only have one or two trains in the evening time that actually leave from here, from Tacoma to go to Seattle. Or if we had more of a light rail system than we do, but they aren't going to open up this other light rail coming soon in the next year or so." - Pierce County Resident*

## Ferries

In the month prior to the focus groups, 30% of participants (9) say they used ferries as their primary mode, while 23% of participants (9) say they do not use ferries. Those who use them say it's primarily for getting to recreational and leisure activities (63%), running errands or to reach appointments (30%), or to visit family and friends (23%).

### Experience

Our participant data collected during registration highlights that people near water routes generally view ferries as part of their recreation and leisure modes of transit.



However, focus group participants reported that ferry wait times can be long and unpredictable, sometimes adding unexpected hours to their commute, which makes them difficult to use.

*"I missed the ferry yesterday and had to wait an extra three hours before it came back."*  
- Young Adult Participant

*"I've missed ferries and I've needed to wait several hours for the next one."* - Young Adult Participant

*"I've only been on [ferries] a couple of times and it was fun."* - Snohomish County Resident

## Key Barriers

Several participants expressed frustration about state-level ferry funding and the downstream effects, including impacts on fleet availability, number of trips per day, number of trips during peak hours, and ongoing staffing constraints.

*"We have a ferry system that doesn't have the frequency and reliability to really be viable."* - Snohomish County Resident

*"The ferry systems have reduced frequency because of [funding] and maintenance problems and they cancel trips, making it unreliable for people like me who have to make ferry to bus connections home. It becomes a huge deterrent to using the system as much as I would like."* - Snohomish County Resident

*"We really badly need to fund Washington State Ferries so that it integrates well into the rest of the transit family."* - Snohomish County Resident

## Improvements

Participants who used ferries expressed a need for expanded ferry schedules that include set wait times, which could make it easier for travelers to plan their trips.

*"More ferry times (or maybe an extra ferry especially for Seattle)."* - Kitsap County Resident

*"Set wait time at the ports... even ten minutes would help a ton of people."* - Young Adult Participant

## Seattle Streetcar

Participants were divided about the usefulness of the Seattle streetcar; the limited service area was noted as a primary barrier to use, however a few participants said they use it to commute through the South Lake Union or First Hill areas.

*"The trolley hasn't ever seemed super useful to me because the streetcar lines aren't very long."* - Young Adult Participant

*"Regarding streetcars... I'd rather see frequent electric buses than streetcars. Anything that can get stuck behind traffic is a deterrent." - Snohomish County Participant*

*"I've never found [trolleys] very useful due to other ways of getting around... walking is faster." - Young Adult Participant*

*"Honestly, I just think they're a waste of time, they're more of a tourist attraction." - Snohomish County Resident*

## Single Occupancy Vehicles

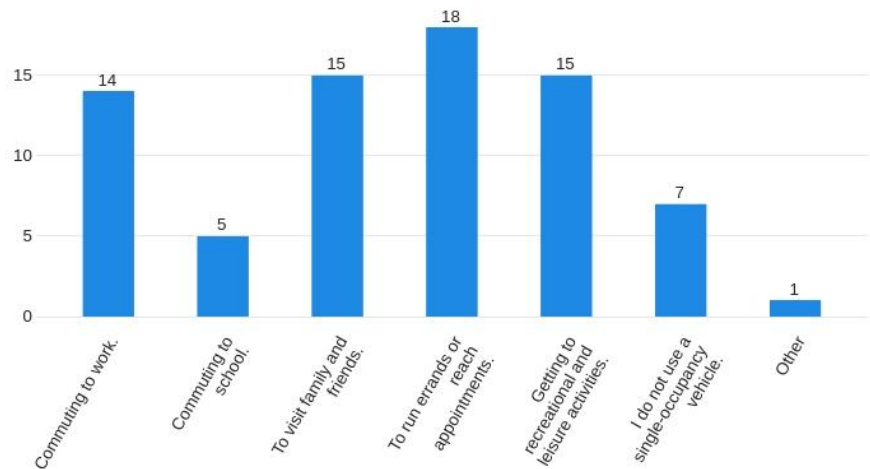
In the month prior to the focus groups, 53% of participants (16) say they used single occupancy vehicles as their primary mode. They mostly use single occupancy vehicles for running errands or to reach appointments (60%), visiting family and friends (50%), getting to recreational and leisure activities (50%), and commuting to work (46%).

### Experience and Barriers

The draft 2022 Regional Transportation Plan notes that "By the year 2050, single-occupancy vehicle (SOV) mode shares to work are forecast to decrease to approximately 52%. Reductions in SOV mode share are accompanied by increases in walking, biking and transit, which in 2050 are forecast to account for approximately 32% of all work trips made in the region, up from 17% today," (151).

Participants tended to agree that they would prefer not to drive through the Puget Sound region, and noted that driving can be a frustrating, unpredictable, and time-consuming experience. However, we also heard that in most cases, driving was faster and more convenient than using public transit, and that participants were unlikely to switch modes until that changed.

*When Participants Use Single Occupancy Vehicles*



*"I wish I could get along without a car." - Kitsap County Resident*

*"I wish I could drive because it's so much faster to get from point A to point B." - Snohomish County Resident*

*"Cars seem like a default and that makes it difficult for folks without cars." - Kitsap County Resident*

*"I end up just choosing to drive because it's more convenient and it's just easier for me to navigate." - Snohomish County Resident*

Traffic on main roadways was mentioned as the primary barrier to using single occupancy vehicles.

*“When it's really backed up, I would love to exit the highway and take an alternate route. I feel like there's not a lot of options, especially in certain parts of the I-5 heading south on the I-5... you're kind of just stuck.” - Pierce County Resident*

## Improvements

Participants were divided on highway expansion. A few participants voiced a need for more lanes to mitigate heavy traffic commuting through the region; however, a young adult participant urged elected officials to invest in transit instead of increasing the number of lanes.

*“Think of ways to get more cars off the road or at least off the road in areas where that density is currently holding up.” - Young Adult Participant*

*“We need more lanes on the highway... commuter lanes as well.” - Snohomish County Resident*

*“We absolutely do not need more lanes, because every time you do that, it sounds great... but more and more people choose to drive. And I'm like, if you want to put more lanes on the interstate network between Everett and Tacoma, okay, fine, put a toll on them and have the tolls pay for the new lanes. And it's free if you take the carpool on transit lines. But what would really help me get around a lot easier would be more frequency, more coverage, more span of service, more transit service... We need to invest in public transit.” - Snohomish County Resident*

*“More lanes - Highway 10 is a two-way highway, as well as Highway 167. There's just too many commuters for such a small route” - Pierce County Resident*

Participants shared several other ideas for continued investments in roadway infrastructure, including roundabouts, more frequent electric vehicle charging stations, completing carpool lanes, and flyovers.

*“I lived in New England for four decades and they started putting a lot more roundabouts in because they demonstrated that there is data out there that it really does free up traffic. The community has to learn how to drive on them, which does take some time.” - Kitsap County Resident*

*“Electric vehicle charging in parking garages and [bus stations].” - Young Adult Participant*

*“Completing the carpool lane on Highway 167 would cut my commute significantly.” - Pierce County Resident*

*“Flyovers make things really easy in a lot of places, where instead of having to go through the regular city street... The truck drivers could get off the regular road on a flyover over to the docks or whatever area that they're going to. Make it easier for them to get there and it would get them out of the main traffic. There's a bus in Orting and*



*that leaves there and it goes right on the flyover and it feels like it's in Federal Way in like five minutes.” - King County Resident*

Education campaigns about how to be a courteous and safe driver was a suggestion across focus groups. This, participants felt, might help to address some of the safety concerns posed by drivers to other mode users (pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users).

*“You see people not letting a person in and it creates a bottleneck and then has those ripple effects.... They show where somebody brakes really hard and it has this ripple effect miles back. And so more awareness of defensive but courteous driving... An awareness campaign of just being courteous to people, being a nice person out on the road.” - King County Resident*

*“I think [transit agencies] can put up more information about driving, being safe while driving in the rain, checking your tires or whatever and taking public transportation.” - Snohomish County Resident*

*“It seems like the traffic is worse when it's raining... It rains here often enough, but people seem to not know how to maneuver their cars during the rain... Maybe put out some information about people driving in the weather or or encouraging people to take public transportation when we know it's going to rain.” - Snohomish County Resident*

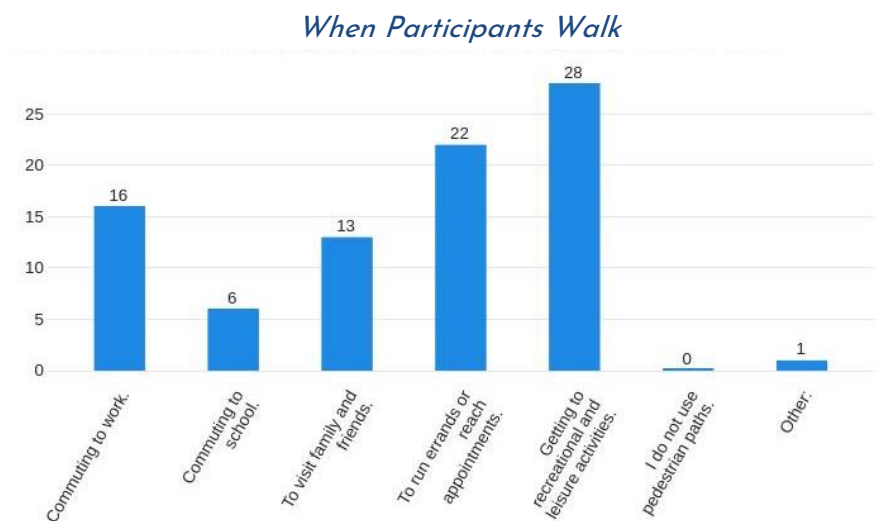
## Human-Powered Modes

### Walking

In the month prior to the focus groups, 60% of participants (18) say they walked or rolled as their primary mode. Almost all participants walk and/or roll to recreational and leisure activities (93%), while many also walk to run errands or to reach appointments (73%), to commute to work (53%), or to visit family and friends (43%). During the focus groups, we heard 32 mentions of pedestrian improvements and 31 mentions of sidewalk improvements.

#### Experience

When asked about their best-case vision of the future, there was broad consensus from participants on investing in sidewalks and being able to walk more often to more places. Many (44%) registrants say they “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement “I feel safe while using pedestrian options in my community,” such as sidewalks or crosswalks. However, we heard that pedestrian infrastructure isn’t always set up to accommodate this due to cracks, roots breaking through the concrete, missing curb ramps, gaps in the sidewalk and crosswalk network, and unsafe driving.



*“I would like to walk more. I currently bus to get to work and as many places as I can, but I also own a car and drive to more far-flung locales... but I'd love to walk more as possible.” - King County Resident*

*“My best case scenario would be having more walkable communities. I live in North Everett, and it's nice because I can walk a lot of places, but it is somewhat challenging to walk very far because you get to a point where there aren't going to be sidewalks or you're on a really busy street. And so finding ways to incorporate walking options and biking options and in just a safer way, that's mainly the reason why I don't walk as many places as I could.” - Snohomish County Resident*

*“The sidewalks in my neighborhood are great. Unfortunately, there are no sidewalks to connect us to other parts of the city.” - Pierce County Resident*

*“The first six months that I lived here I didn't have a car and so I was exclusively walking and biking. My neighborhood allowed that and it worked just fine. However, for things like dental appointments or grocery shopping, I'm used to living in areas where I could maybe book a car or be on a very regular bus route. And so that was a bit of a hard shift for me.” - Kitsap County Resident*

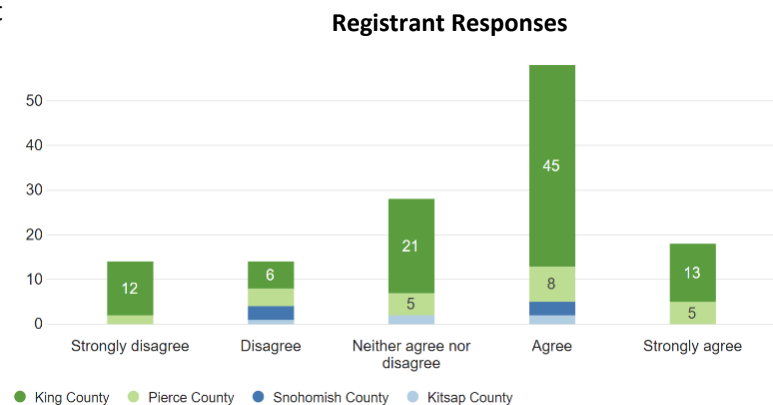
## Key Barriers

16% say they “disagree” or “strongly disagree” with the statement “I feel safe while using pedestrian options in my community.” Respondents in Pierce and King County tended to feel safer using sidewalks and crosswalks, whereas registrants in Snohomish and Kitsap Counties were divided.

Primary pedestrian safety concerns included:

- Lack of sidewalk, or missing links to connect sections of sidewalks or pedestrian paths, particularly near high-speed roadways such as freeways.
- Missing crosswalk marking and flashing safety lights.
- Lack of lighting between transit stops and where people live.
- Lack of advance planning for construction detours.
- Cars or construction signage parked on sidewalks.

*“I feel safe while using pedestrian options (sidewalks/crosswalks) in my community”*



For many participants, pedestrian safety concerns were a key deterrent from regularly getting outside, especially for people with mobility challenges or those in wheelchairs.

*"I end up being in the street because the sidewalks are not completely passable... There are still blocks that don't have sidewalks at all, or the cutouts are old." - Kitsap County Resident*

*"There are some areas around where I live, where there aren't even any sidewalks at all. It's a very narrow strip between you and the traffic... you reach out your arm and probably get whacked off by a car on the way." - Pierce County Resident*

*"You see tree roots that are disrupting the sidewalk and there's a lot of uneven panels. Actually, I was walking with my mother just the other day and she's a little bit elderly, and she tripped and fell and got quite injured because there was a panel that had been pushed up by a tree root." - Pierce County Resident*

*"There's a lot of parts of the city that don't have curb ramps for people to get off and on sidewalks. And there's also big parts of the city and county that don't have sidewalks at all." - Young Adult Participant*

Some participants said that crossing streets as a pedestrian can present significant safety issues, especially when there are missing crosswalks or lighting along busy roads.

*"They spread out the crosswalks so that it's two or three gigantic mega-blocks... So your options are to walk way out of your way to get to a crosswalk and then walk back, or what most people do, which is to dart across seven lanes of traffic at a corner." - Snohomish County Resident*

*"Walking can be challenging because of lack of crosswalks and visibility for pedestrians or stoplights to use at a crosswalk." - Pierce County Participant*

*"I work in downtown and downtown Seattle, and most of the crosswalks work and there's good signage and lighting, but it's still kind of treacherous to cross certain streets or to walk too close to the freeway... As a pedestrian, it's still sometimes difficult to compete with cars and other vehicles for space." - Young Adult Participant*

We heard from many participants about local issues in sidewalk quality. They noted that the historically cool, wet climate in the Pacific Northwest exacerbates roadway and sidewalk quality issues as stormwater collects in potholes and sidewalk cracks.

*"The streets are terrible when it rains... you're liable to get soaked [from cars passing by]." - Pierce County Resident*

*"My neighborhood has pretty solid sidewalks, but... I'm annoyed with the way that sidewalks drain, because when it rains, cars will just splash puddles onto you. When you're walking and being half soaking wet whenever you get where you're trying to go is not ideal." - Young Adult Participant*

Many participants illustrated areas in their neighborhoods where sidewalk maintenance was an issue, with leaf pileup causing routes to be slippery or cause trip hazards. A few noted that existing crosswalk signs in their community are not currently maintained.

*“Some of these crosswalk signs don't work... or they malfunction. They need to improve those signals.” - Kitsap County Participant*

*“There are so many leaves on the ground and they're wet and they get all slippery. It's to the point of being unsafe in a lot of areas with stuff growing out over it.” - King County Resident*

*“In some parts of the city here, there's trees that are growing, the root systems of the trees have to move out themselves, and it creates these big juts where if you're walking, you're likely to trip... there's some spots where [the shifting of the sidewalks is] pretty pronounced.” - King County Resident*

## Improvements

Many participants suggested improvements to pedestrian infrastructure, particularly, additional and well-lit sidewalks to connect homes to destinations like transit stops, stores, medical appointments, parks, and places of employment.

*“I walk an average of six to nine miles a day, there needs to be more sidewalks on streets there, not very many sidewalks unless you're strolling the main street in town. I enjoy walking, just in a safe place to walk.” - King County Participant*

The need for crosswalks was raised in every discussion (14 comments), with several mentions of safety lighting at crosswalks, especially along high-speed roads.

*“More and more crosswalks. That would help out a lot and make everything a lot safer.” - Pierce County Participant*

*“Some people don't even stop when the lights are flashing because it's unfamiliar to them. I think more [flashing lights] so that both pedestrians and drivers are more used to this.” - Pierce County Participant*

Participants recommended improved lighting between transit stops and where people live to address visibility and safety concerns.

*“My house is a few blocks away [from the bus stop], and coming home and having to walk... scares me, because it is so dark and dangerous. Sometimes it's hard for cars to see us.” - King County Participant*

Many participants, especially those with mobility concerns, expressed a need for sidewalk repairs and renovations in their neighborhoods to increase accessibility (the topic of pedestrian safety is explored more in “**Safety**”).

*"It would be really nice to see a lot wider sidewalks and pathways or maybe alternate walking trails or paths that are again, very smooth, nice, and paved." - Kitsap County Resident*

*"I would place a higher priority on the sidewalks just because those are really crucial for people of all different abilities, income levels and locations, and there's really not very much consistency among the county and how those are maintained." - Kitsap County Resident*

When construction will hinder pedestrian pathways, participants suggest improved outreach and route planning for pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers so that modes are not crowded unsafely into unintended routes. Construction signage itself was noted as a barrier to pedestrians when signage is placed on sidewalks, blocking paths from use, particularly for those with wheelchairs or mobility canes.

*"In dense areas, planning for pedestrian, bike, and car routes around construction, especially when the whole half of the street is taken up sometimes for six months, sometimes for a couple of weeks, sometimes for years on end. There's reroutes in those weird elevated sidewalks and fake jersey barriers in place. Sometimes I can see it looks like there weren't any better options, and sometimes it looks like someone turned a blind eye and the construction just sprawled into the street, and no one's really looking after it or carrying to make the space usable for anyone else." - Young Adult Participant*

*"Sometimes when they're doing road construction, they put these signs on the sidewalks. They're talking about the road construction, the road being blocked and trying to get by on the sidewalk. I'm like, well, yeah, I mean, why are you using the sidewalk for signs, you know?" - King County Resident*

Similarly, one participant who lives near a school for blind people noted that they had regularly seen drivers parking on top of sidewalks and blocking blind users from the path.

*"They just pull over and park their car on the sidewalk, and there are some blind people using that sidewalk and they blocked them." - King County Participant*

Participants suggested that if the above concerns were addressed, it would increase both their and community utilization.

Some participants expressed an interest in broader pedestrian-focused improvements, including integrated pedestrian infrastructure and car-free streets.

*"We have really good sidewalks and they've added a lot of good.... A bridge that goes from North Everett to go down to the waterfront connected an area that otherwise the route that you would walk wouldn't have been preferable. You'd be walking along a really busy road for much of the way. And instead they built this really pretty bridge that just takes you right to where you would want to be down there. And I think it'd be great to see that kind of development in other areas of the city." - Snohomish County Resident*

*“There are these trunks of these little downtowns that I think would be much more welcoming to folks if cars weren't tearing through them and they just don't really need to all the time, right? There's other routes.” - Kitsap County Resident*

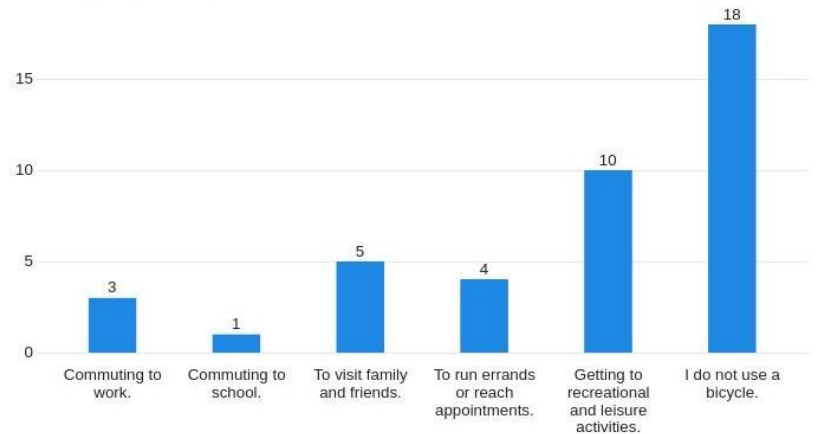
## Bicycles

In the month prior to the focus groups, 10% of participants (3) say they used bikes, skates, or scooters as their primary mode. While 60% of participants (18) say they never use bicycles, those who do use bicycles primarily use them for getting to recreational and leisure activities (33%) and to visit family and friends (16%). Similarly, 76% of participants (23) say they never use scooters, but those who do use scooters primarily use them for getting to recreational and leisure activities (20%), to run errands or reach appointments (13%), or to visit family and friends (13%).

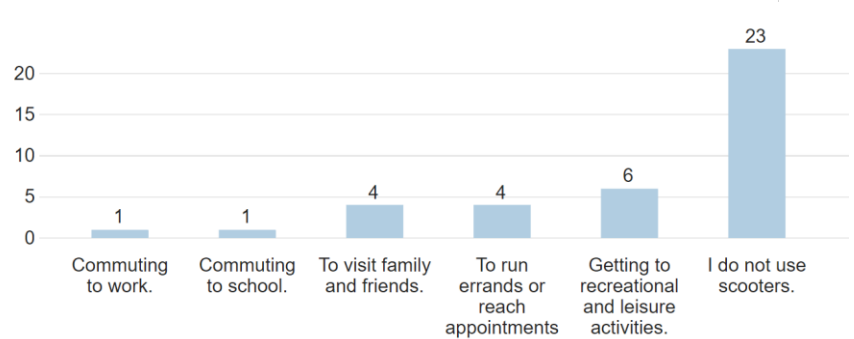
### Experience

Participant data collected during registration indicated that subjects with bicycles generally liked biking as part of their recreation and leisure activities, but didn't feel as safe commuting to work via bike when they're alone.

*When Participants Use Bicycles*



*When Participants Use Scooters*



*“I'm a pretty fair-weather biker, so in the summer months, I like to bike for fun with friends.” - Young Adult Participant*

*“I enjoy biking in my neighborhood for fun, but I'm not able to bike for transportation due to the lack of safe roadways.” - Pierce County Resident*

*“Biking as a solo biker is very different from biking in a group. I feel a lot safer in a group.” - Young Adult Participant*

Participants who do bike regularly say they appreciate updated bike lanes and bike trails that prioritize safety, lighting, and other safety considerations. Bike trails, as opposed to bike lanes, were seen as a positive component of biking infrastructure.

*“There's some other trails that are nice and smooth and easy to get out, get on, and get places. And you're not dealing with all of the other traffic.” - King County Resident*

*"My easiest route to the downtown area involves trails, and they're not sidewalks at all, and they're much smoother. There's no cross traffic." - Kitsap County Resident*

*"I used to commute from Seattle to Bellevue, and when the new 520 Bike Trail opened up, it was just a night and day difference, like taking I-90 versus 520 over to the East Side. I think a lot of that's the width in the space of the trail, but there's better drainage and sightlines and lighting. It's a brand new road, so hopefully that's all as good as it's going to get. It was a lot more attractive to use that... even though I-90 was usually a lot more convenient for me getting over to Bellevue." - Young Adult Participant*

## Key Barriers

Bike safety was a major barrier to participants commuting via bike, especially in denser, urban areas or areas with vegetation. In general, those who bike said they feel vulnerable to cars, and feel safer biking in a group than on their own.

*"I'd love to be a person who bikes in Seattle, but I did not grow up in a place where you biked in traffic at all, so I don't feel comfortable doing that. I've held off on getting a bicycle and using that more regularly because I don't feel comfortable not using a protected bike lane or designated bike path." - Young Adult Participant*

*"I was a very enthusiastic biker in previous places and am not so enthusiastic about it now. One of the reasons is because there isn't consistency with bike lanes or on a meta level, awareness of non-car vehicles on roads." - Kitsap County Resident*

*"Biking as a solo biker is very different from biking in a group. I feel a lot safer in a group. Cars tend to just respect you more." - Young Adult Participant*

*"Sometimes you end up writing on the sidewalks because you either can't keep up with traffic or don't feel safe being out in a traffic lane." - Young Adult Participant*

Participants who bike regularly shared that existing bike lanes can be difficult to navigate, and that there are gaps in coverage. Many participants shared that making the jump from recreational riding to commute riding can be intimidating.

*"A lot of the bike lanes seem like they're specifically designed for the spandex Peloton crowd." - Kitsap County Resident*

*"It seems like there's a lot of trails, but they're shorter, maybe five or ten-mile long trails. If there was a way to connect them to a network of trails that really connect." - Pierce County Resident*

*"Biking intimidates me because of the hills and interactions with cars seems dangerous without more infrastructure. I've used a bike share once in a group, but I still felt a little*

*overwhelmed because I don't bike as well as other people driving, biking, or walking expected me to.” - Young Adult Participant*

Participants noted that overgrown vegetation on the ground or at eye level can pose a safety risk to bikers who approach quickly and may not have time to duck or swerve out of the way. Layered leaves that are wet were also noted as a safety risk to bicyclists.

*“I was riding my bike in Federal Way. I was on the sidewalk because I was on a bike lane there, and... the branches from this tree that were growing out across the sidewalk were so low that I had to get down, sit down on the bar on the bike to not hit my head on it. If I hadn't noticed it like it, literally I would have smacked my face on the thing.” - King County Participant*

*“Branches from this tree growing out across the sidewalk were so low that I had to get down on the bike to not hit my head on it... if I hadn't noticed it I would have smacked my face on the thing.” - King County Resident*

One participant noted that the streetcar/trolley track posed a safety risk to bicyclists, which they experienced firsthand.

*“It was right outside of King Street Station. I went to go across the road... and the trolley track that's right there. It's recessed into the ground and I didn't even think about it. And my bike tire actually got caught in the trolley track and I ended up falling off the bike and smacking my head off the side of the pavement. And I mean, that's partially my fault, the lack of awareness, but also... I don't remember seeing like a sign or anything like, ‘watch out for cracks or something.’” - King County Participant*

We also heard that there is a cultural component to some participants' hesitation to biking. One participant shared a perception that Muslim women can often be discouraged from riding bikes due to religious reasons. Other participants shared other cultural gender constraints on access to biking.

*“I'm thinking personally about my family, I'm one of the few women in my family that knows how to ride a bike.” - King County Resident*

## Improvements

Participants tended to agree that investing in well-planned biking infrastructure (e.g., bike trails, bike lanes, clear signage, etc.) would help mitigate safety concerns. Many participants suggested continued collaboration between bicyclists and city planners to ensure these investments are in the right areas.

*“[There's an] opportunity to connect with local parks and rec departments and people who are working on the trail side, because not only are a lot of pedestrian trails and bike trails used for commuting and functional purposes, but also for recreational purposes. And so there's a lot of areas for collaboration between who's working on making areas more walkable and more bikeable.” - Kitsap County Resident*



*“Having better sidewalks and bike lanes or other methods of keeping more of a bike-car and bike- pedestrian separation.” - Young Adult Participant*

*“I would love to see more walkable and bikeable areas... for increased equity and having a more welcoming and also a slightly cheaper way to get around.” - Kitsap County Resident*

*“If there's an ability to strategically plot out well planned, clear signage for bike routes... That would be a huge breath of fresh air for casual bikers, bike commuters, people biking for errands. It really opens up a lot of doors, and hopefully we'll have drivers be a little less oblivious when it's more visible that they can see there are bikers and we have the infrastructure for it.” - Kitsap County Resident*

Several participants commented on the merits of electric bikes, especially for hilly terrain in the Pacific Northwest. However, the cost of electric bikes or traditional bikes was seen as a barrier for some participants, who suggested subsidies or bike-share/micro mobility options to increase access to bikes (this topic is explored further in “Access”).

*“Bikes aren't cheap, so I'm hesitant to make the investment because I'm not confident I'd bike enough for it to be worth it.” - Young Adult Participant*

*“I have a regular bike that I use and it is murder trying to get around the place to some of the places here in Seattle or in some other rural areas trying to get up and down hills. If there was subsidization for electrically assisted bikes to buy or rent... I used one once to get around and it's like night and day.” - King County Resident*

*“I remember before the pandemic we had scooter sharing, bike sharing and car sharing. It'd be nice to see those businesses come back because it's the first mile, last mile [of commuting that] can be a problem... [When] you have a very segmented, fragmented [transit] system it's very hard.” - Snohomish County Resident*

Both cyclists and drivers in the groups expressed an interest in bicycle safety education.

## Multi-Mode Infrastructure

### Park & Rides

Some participants raised concerns about the availability of park & rides, and recommended additional locations and expansions to existing park & ride centers.

*“Think of ways to get more cars off the road or at least off the road in areas where that density is currently holding up buses and people who really do need to drive to get from one point to another. So if there are more places for people to park cars or bikes and then take the light rail or an express bus into their final destination or really close to their final destination, that could ultimately be a really big environmental and time saving for people.” - Young Adult Participant*

*“Some of the parking lots in the area where I live are full before 7 am. So if they had an expansion, especially if people aren't comfortable catching the bus from their neighborhood to the parking lot and they can just park there if they expanded parking?”*  
- Snohomish County Resident

## **Building and Structure Improvements**

Many participants noted a general lack of bus shelters, particularly challenging during wet weather seasons. Participants tended to agree that more shelters would help to increase usage and ridership.

*“More bus shelters. If they enclose bus stops, you can stay warm and not get soaked or get sick because of how cold it is in the winter months.”* - King County Resident

*“There's a lot of these bus stops along the route that don't have a shelter. So you're standing out and pouring down rain, waiting for the bus to show up... if there's more shelters available that would really help out a lot.”* - Pierce County Resident

*“If it's raining and you have to get to the bus, everybody is going to try to squeeze under there because not everybody has umbrellas.”* - King County Resident

The need for more bus shelters was echoed by calls for continued cleaning and maintenance to existing shelters.

*“If the [bus shelter] glass was thick enough so somebody couldn't break it... The glass gets busted all the freaking time, which makes it when you're using it, it's cold, it's raining. It's not providing the enclosure that it's supposed to provide.”* - King County Resident

*“[Bus stops need] regular maintenance probably a couple of times a day... Garbage is everywhere, and once the bus stops get kind of messed up, I feel like that's sort of when the trouble starts, I feel like it just ends up attracting more trouble later down the road.”*  
- Snohomish County Resident

## **Reducing Pollution**

The draft 2022 Regional Transportation Plan notes that “climate change is a primary focus of VISION 2050” (128), however this was not a factor for most focus group participants when they plan their trips or commutes. Several participants shared that they prefer public transit options because it helps to protect the environment, and others mentioned concern about pollution or environmental impact of our transportation system.

*“Carbon emission-free electric cars should be the future transportation.”* - Snohomish County Resident

*“Think of ways to get more cars off the road or at least off the road in areas where that density is currently holding up... If there are more places for people to park cars or bikes*

*and then take the light rail or an express bus into their final destination or really close to their final destination, that could ultimately be a really big environmental and time saving for people.” - Young Adult Participant*

*“The ferries and the noise of the ferry and the pollution from the ferry does actually affect the water life. So I think that's something that should be taken into consideration... There has to be a balance between several different modalities of travel.” - Kitsap County Resident*

## Wayfinding and Trip Planning

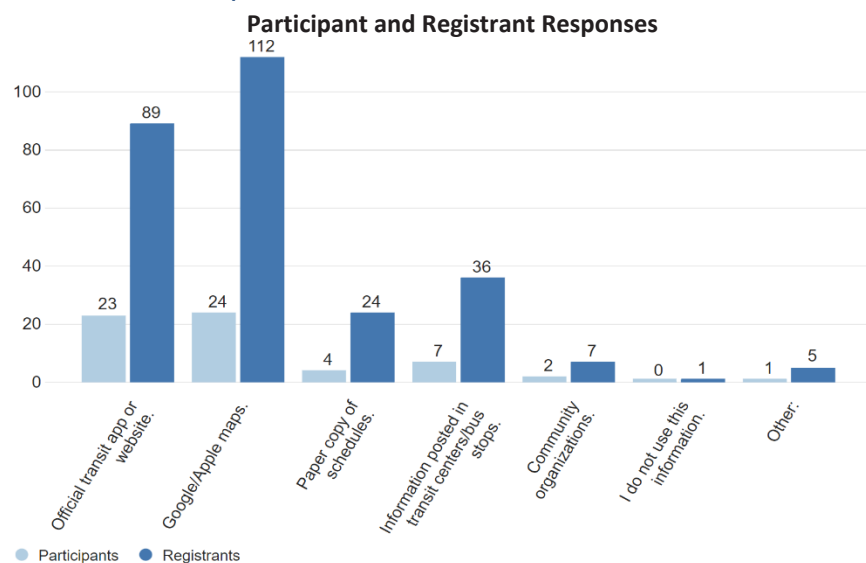
### Current Experience

For many participants, coordinating multi-mode trips on public transit can be difficult to navigate. Participants noted that this often prompted them to drive a single occupancy vehicle rather than take transit.

*“Being able to get from point A to point B using public transportation can be really challenging to get from where I am to where I could catch a bus that would get me to Seattle. I think I would have to do quite a bit of walking... Ultimately, I end up just choosing to drive because it's more convenient and it's just easier for me to navigate.” - Snohomish County Resident*

*“I took the bus very few times because it was pretty arduous. It was a pretty long process to get down [to Seattle]. And so I feel like I've run into a lot of things that don't work.” - Snohomish County Resident*

#### Where People Go for Transit and Schedule Information



Many participants shared that unpredictable commute times are a deterrent to using more public transit instead of driving. (This topic is explored further in “**Single Occupancy Vehicles.**”)

*“I think my biggest challenge with driving on busy roads is just the unpredictability of it... that's been a big barrier for me. It's really challenging to know how long it will take me to get to it. Sometimes it's 40 minutes, sometimes it's two hours.” - Pierce County Resident*

*“If I want to go down to Auburn, it's like two-and-a-half hours [via transit], [whereas] you get in the car and it's like 30 minutes, maybe.” - King County Resident*

Concerns about unpredictable commute times were exacerbated for those transferring between different transit modes during periods of heavy traffic.

*“Coordinating bus schedules... There's just a lot of disconnect, and if you miss one, it throws off the whole series.” - Kitsap County Resident*

*“Having to take a lot of buses to get to a destination tends to be frustrating because you have to hope the bus you're on is running on time so you can catch the bus that you need to take next.” - Young Adult Participant*

We asked participants to share how unpredictable commutes impact their life, and heard that transit delays can make it difficult to hold down a job and fulfill personal obligations.

*“There will be buses that are either 5 - 20 minutes late or buses won't show up at all... When you're standing there and it's been 20 minutes and you've got to get to work... It's not the bus driver's fault, but it's also not your fault, either. But it puts you in a bad position and that's not good.” - Young Adult Participant*

*“I think [unpredictable commutes] would be a really big barrier if I was being held accountable for really stressful working hours.” - Pierce County Resident*

## Ease of Navigation

Throughout all focus groups, participants suggested a tool like a centralized mobile app that could consolidate regional transit schedules and help reload ORCA cards, share schedules and accurate, real-time updates, and provide information about services and opportunities available.

*“Centralizing all these different technological capabilities, like having an app where you can plan your route for all the counties, but also where you can reload your ORCA pass or where you can buy tickets, or where you can find the fastest routes, like for specific regions like just a centralized location.” - Snohomish County Resident*

*“There should be a way to sign up for those kinds of updates so they come to your phone or you can use a transit app... unfortunately One Bus Away is not very reliable anymore.”*  
- Kitsap County Resident

*“I noticed that King County can tell you what time the bus is coming. If it's late, you get the real time expectation and when the bus is going to come. That would be helpful.”* - Snohomish County Resident

*“[We need an] improved notification system on the bus delays and ferry cancellations, either app based or on Twitter.”* - Kitsap County Resident

Some participants also expressed a need for low-technology options, such as broader distribution of printed materials.

*“Thinking of folks that do not have access or the skills to use technology, also having printed materials at more locations in-language... I'm thinking like sometimes [you can] load your card at CVS, Walgreens, that kind of thing. Why not also... everything that you might need around transit in the area?”* - Snohomish County Resident

## Building Transit Awareness

Several participants reflected that attending the focus groups helped them learn from their fellow community members about transportation options and amenities currently available to them. This prompted many participants to express a need for more promotion and advertising about how to effectively use existing transit programs (referred to as **“Transportation Demand Management”** in the draft 2022 Regional Transportation Plan).

*“I also feel like transportation should have [information] on the bus... I think they should have this stuff on the bus with pamphlets where you could easily grab and know that this is available to you so you can utilize it.”* - King County Resident

*“A lot of people aren't familiar with the different systems that they would have to use and whatnot... More awareness would probably help people get around better as I see other people have a lot of trouble.”* - King County Resident

*“There were multiple bus systems that I'd have to use to get places and needed to change between counties, but the ORCA card makes that really convenient. But if people don't know about that, like a lot of people aren't familiar with the different systems that they would have to use.”* - King County Resident

*“[It would be nice to have] signage at the bus stops on the enclosures, in the buses themselves, in the spots where there are ads and things. TV, internet, radio, you know, just the places people hear things and see things, have them in those places... I've seen a lot of people use [transit] to come in for [baseball and football] games... so it's nice to see people use it for that.”* - King County Resident

## Region-Wide Coordination

The draft 2022 Regional Transportation Plan states that “an on-going priority is coordinated scheduling between modes and services, especially at shared terminals,” (47). Participants in all focus groups perceived that coordination between transit agencies and jurisdictions presently is limited. Many participants associated their frustrating trip planning and multi-county commutes with what they viewed as patchwork transit agency coverage or lack of coordination.

*“When you have one schedule for one agency and that agency needs, you’re required to mesh with other routes and then the other agencies... we also have all this dwell time, and it isn’t five minutes or 10 minutes to go to the bathroom, get a coffee, get back on. It’s more like half an hour. Forty-five minutes.” - Snohomish County Resident*

*“I would like to see them expand the hours running more later than what they do in Pierce County. I know in Seattle they run a lot later than they do over here, and it makes it harder for the people that do work at night to maintain their jobs because... They can’t get home, you know?” - Pierce County Resident*

*“Kitsap Transit does a good job of connecting with the ferries, but in Seattle, what I’ve been told is that ferry riders are such a tiny percentage of either Sound Transit or Metro that they don’t care about ferry riders. It’s just not worth it to them to bother. But that is a huge problem when you can’t somehow connect the two systems.” - Kitsap County Resident*

*“Making it easier to get around would be buses running more often or buses aligning with each other.” - Pierce County Resident*

We also heard from one participant who often commutes into Skagit County, which borders the PSRC-identified region. They echoed the sentiment in the draft 2022 Regional Transportation Plan that “Multimodal connections to services bordering the region enhance the function and reach of the regional transit network” (47), but that there are additional inter-agency coordination issues that extend beyond the region.

*“There needs to be good integration with the lack of frequency, especially because Skagit Transit ends all service at 9 pm and the last bus out of Everett’s at 7:20 pm... There should be... more financial aid to smaller transits to have longer spans of service.” - Snohomish County Resident*

## Safety

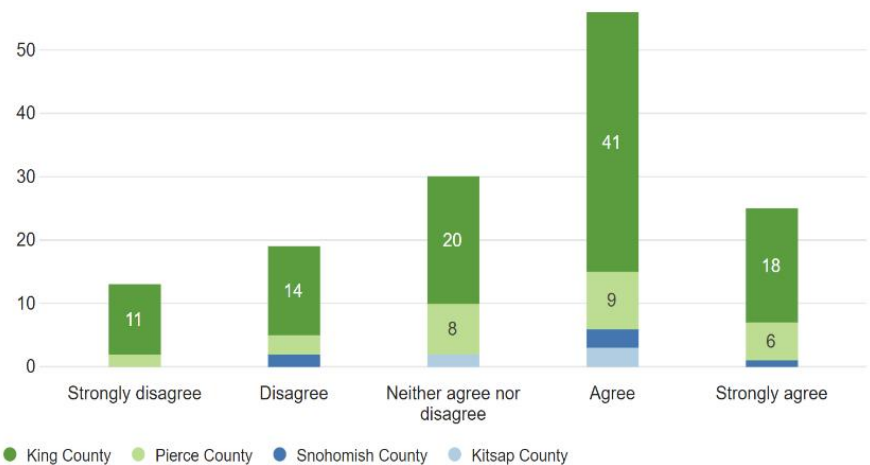
Participants were asked about their sense of safety while getting to and from transit options in their community, while using transit, and while using pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure.

## Getting to and from Transit

47% of registrants indicated that they “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement, “I feel safe getting to and from the transit options in my community.” 18% of registrants say they either “disagree” or “strongly disagree” with the statement. Primary safety concerns while getting to and from transit included:

- Lack of lighting.
- Missing pedestrian infrastructure.
- Lack of signage.
- Lack of options when they’ve missed the last bus home.

*“I feel safe getting to and from the transit options in my community.”*



## Lighting

Participants from every county noted safety concerns due to a lack of lighting between their home and nearby transit options. At times, they say this makes it difficult for bus drivers to see that they’re at the stop.

*“Our local park and ride is very dark at night... some more lights would really help.” - Pierce County Resident*

*“I think some of these [bus] stops are out in the middle of the country... The lighting is very, very, very poor. And so the bus driver doesn't really know that you're there until it gets right up on you. And so it makes it easier for them and for us if they could come out with some kind of extra lighting for the stop in those areas.” - Pierce County Resident*

*“There's a park in Bremerton that is pitch dark when you walk and you can only see where you're going when cars are driving through the high speed.” - Young Adult Participant*

Increased lighting along pedestrian and bicycle routes were a popular suggestion for improving safety (29 mentions).

*“The darkness. It's so dark in the wintertime, it is really challenging to feel safe, no matter how much light you have on yourself and on your bike. It's challenging how dark it is here.” - Pierce County Participant*

## Safe and Helpful Bus Stops

Many participants shared safety concerns related to their bus stop. They recommended adding transit stop patrols and bus stop infrastructure like sidewalks, lighting, seating, and covers so that people can get out of the elements and stay socially distanced from other users.

*“Sometimes the bus stops, they don't seem very safe... Sometimes when I do have to haul my kids and I have to go take them to their doctor's appointments, I'm just kind of hovering over my kids because it's not really a safe environment where we have to catch the buses out.” - King County Participant*

*“Bigger bus stop shelters... With COVID going on, if it's raining and you have to get to the bus, everybody is going to try to squeeze under there, because not everybody has umbrellas.” - King County Participant*

One participant shared that while they were experiencing homelessness, they found refuge at bus stops, where they knew they could find a seat and safety. **They shared the below reflection** and suggested that bus stops present an opportunity to share information (through signage, brochures, transit stewards, etc.) about services and supports that are available.

*“I spent a year and a half homeless... and when I was homeless on the street and I had nowhere to go, nowhere to sleep, nowhere to do anything, I knew I could go sit down at the bus stop.*

*I wasn't a danger to anybody, but people, when they would see me, would feel... I could tell, the way they looked at me, that they felt uncomfortable, because I was dirty and I was unshaven and I was at times probably [had an] unhappy look on my face...*

*Those people have nowhere to go. And so finding a way to help transition them into a better life, more awareness for them of services that are available. Because I talk to people all the time, and they just don't even know all the stuff that's available to homeless people now...*

*As a homeless person, you either have to go sit in an alleyway and hope nobody comes along, or you could be at the bus stop. That's like the one place you can be and actually not get hassled...*

*People don't know what challenges other people are dealing with. They just feel afraid because somebody is loud and erratic and they don't know what to do, and they got their kids with them. And I have kids, too. I'd be freaked out. Yeah, if that were happening. So just a way to get those people to where they need to be in life, and make people aware of the situations that they deal with.”*

*- King County Participant*

## **Pedestrian to Transit Paths**

16% of registrants say they don't feel safe while walking. While we explore this topic further in the “**Human Powered Modes**” section, many participants specifically noted the need for additional sidewalks, curb ramps, established bus stops, and connection of existing pedestrian infrastructure (connecting sidewalks to paths and transit stops) so that they



can safely walk from their homes to transit stops (31 mentions). Crosswalks were the most mentioned pedestrian safety improvement (14 comments).

*“There is no sidewalk in front of my apartment complex, so I have to stand on the side of the road whenever taking the bus there.” - Young Adult Participant*

*“I just really, really wish there were more lit up and designated crossing areas for people to cross where the bus stops are... It's very stressful.” - Kitsap County Participant*

Participants reiterated the need for lighting along pedestrian paths and sidewalks to create safety for walkers, rollers, and bikers.

*“I think a lot of people would be hesitant to use [walking trails] because it's dark and they don't necessarily feel safe. Whereas if it were lit and people knew that it was there, they might use it a lot more.” - King County Resident*

Improving the safety of pedestrian pathways and sidewalk connectivity was a priority for participants throughout discussions.

## Human Infrastructure and Supports

In every session, participants noted the need for personalized support to help them plan their trips, adapt mid-journey when something goes wrong (31 comments), or to help them respond to an emergency or access need. Primary needs included:

- Real-time support for missed connections between modes or legs of a journey.
- Mental health crisis support.
- Conflict de-escalation.
- Homeless services and support.
- Safety enforcement.

*“There's issues with mental illness and people act out and you know, there needs to be resources available.” - Kitsap County Participant*

*“Having transit police on part of the transit agencies would be important... Especially the Edmonton Transit Center, where [there are] high risk issues we have to deal with right now, very concerning. And [we] have a huge homeless population that's getting kind of out of control right now in certain areas.” - Kitsap County Participant*

## Missing the last bus home

In every session, participants noted the safety concerns that arise with cross-county or cross-jurisdictional travel, in particular, what happens when a bus is delayed, canceled, arrives after the connecting bus/transit has already departed, or when they finish work after the last scheduled bus (explored in “**Reality of Long Commutes**”). As a result of these challenges, participants say they’ve ended up stranded at night in a different county than where they live, without reasonably-priced or viable alternative options to get them safely home.

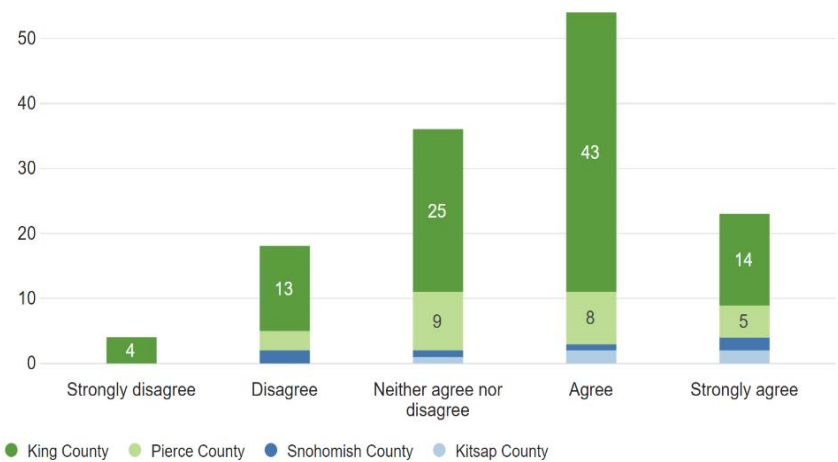
Participants say that expanded hours (evening, nights, weekends), phone alerts, mobile apps, schedule coordination across jurisdictions, and work schedule coordination would help to improve safety in those moments. See “**Appendix A: The Real Cost of Commuting**” for related insights from 2021 Regional Housing Strategy focus group participants.

*“I would like to see them expand the hours, running later than what they do in Pierce County. I know in Seattle they run a lot later than they do over here, and it makes it harder for the people that do work at night to maintain their jobs because they can’t get home.” - Pierce County Participant*

Several participants recalled running toward a bus as it was pulling away, or having their bus arrive too late to catch a connecting route. They suggested increased education to bus drivers about challenges faced by multi-leg commuters, and having bus drivers pause a little longer at stops to leave time for potential transfers. They noted this is especially important when:

- Passengers have disabilities or young dependents, since they may need more time to transfer from one bus to another.
- Other buses are scheduled to arrive at a similar time, in case riders need to switch from one to the other on a tight schedule.

*“I feel safe while using the transit options in my community.”*  
Registrant Responses



*“That might make it easier for everybody, because once people see each other as people, it humanizes us to one another. We’re not just ‘those people,’ they’re not just other masked faces... Understanding each other’s challenges. Seeing what they go through helps them work together better and co-exist better.” - King County Participant*

**Signage**

Signage was mentioned as a safety infrastructure improvement in every discussion except for Pierce County. Participants noted that it can be difficult to find transit stops when signs are absent, overgrown, outdated, or don’t include current schedules.

*"I feel like sometimes if you look it up on Google Maps or whatever route, and it's like, is that a bus stop? I have no idea. It's a sign that's like covered in moss. I don't see anyone else out there.... So directions and navigating, getting around is already pretty difficult for me. I think there could be more accessible signage and [confirmation] you're at the right place, like this bus will definitely take you to where you think it's going." - Kitsap County Resident*

## Safety While Using Transit

More than half of registrants (57%) say they “agree” or “strongly” agree with the statement, “I feel safe while using the transit options in my community. 16% say they “disagree” or “strongly disagree.” Primary safety concerns while using transit included lack of human assistance or emergency response and reducing the spread of germs.

### Lack of human assistance or emergency response

Participants understood that bus drivers cannot both drive safely and respond to emergency passenger needs. However, several participants had experienced a safety threat or witnessed illegal activity while riding transit, and help was not provided. They say an easily accessible panic button and the presence of public safety liaisons or officers would help to ensure safety for riders.

*"I've had an incident where I didn't feel safe on a bus and the bus driver just kept driving because he had to wait to get to the next stop... It would be nice if there's an incident, if the passengers can push a back panic button of some sort to get some help on the bus." - Snohomish County Resident*

*"There has been a big drug pandemic all over the state, but people have definitely gotten more comfortable using drugs out and about in public... I completely feel for them because they're going through addiction. I know how that is, but it's also not okay to just use drugs in front of innocent bystanders and children and stuff, with no regard for nothing that the bus driver can do, because he can't keep his eye on every single person at all times. He's going to have to drive on the road." - Young Adult Participant*

### Spread of Germs

Participants shared that they felt unsafe when crowded under small bus stop shelters with other riders waiting for the bus, or when transit isn't clean. They suggested installing larger bus shelter roofs, and providing hand and seat sanitizer on transit.

*"Maybe they can hand out little spray bottles, where each person can spray their seat before they get on." - King County Participant*

## Accessibility

The draft Regional Transportation Plan cites that “as of 2019, almost half of the region’s population (47%) had special transportation needs, whether they were an older adult (aged 65 or older), youth (age 5-17), a person with low income (household income under 200% of the federal poverty level), or a person with disabilities (including physical and

cognitive disabilities). Although not every person within these groups requires specialized transportation, these group tend to rely more heavily than others on public transit and specialized transportation to meet their daily needs. In many cases, people are in multiple categories, such as an older adult with a disability or a youth who lives in a household with low income" (33). Additionally, the Plan noted that a top mobility challenge for residents is a lack of accessible physical infrastructure, and that a top motivator to get people to use more regular transit is easier access.

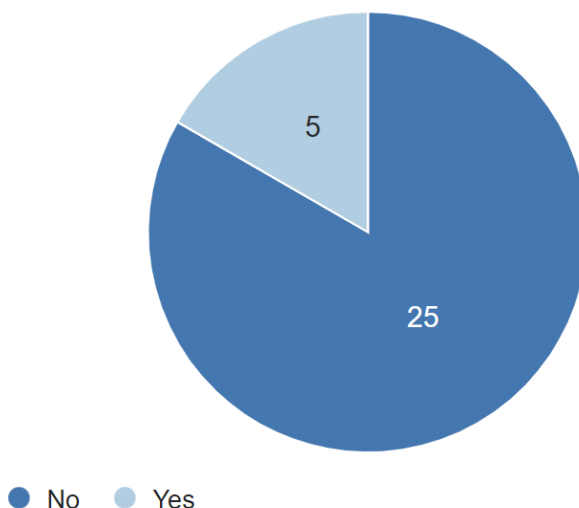
Focus group participants had experienced a range of access needs. Five (5) participants noted that they, or someone living in their household, has impaired vision, hearing, or mobility. Two (2) participants noted that they speak a language other than English at home. Nine (9) participants live in a household with children under the age of 18 years old.

Participants reflected on the challenges they've experienced while accessing our region's current transportation system, noting the following key barriers to access, which are outlined in the section below.

- Not knowing what supports are available to them.
- Lack of human support (customer service, wayfinding, trip planning).
- Lack of ADA-accessible bathrooms.
- Limited wheelchair-accessible seating on buses.
- Lack of specialized and paratransit access.
- Missing curb ramps in sidewalk infrastructure for wheelchairs.
- Limited in-language resources or support.
- High cost.
- Lack of fare integration across jurisdictions or modes.
- Absence of community presence.

*Do you or anyone living in your household experience impaired vision, hearing, or mobility?*

Registrant Responses



## Awareness and Education

Several participants suggested increasing marketing and communication around the programs and services that are available to assist people with access needs.

*"Transportation should have this on the bus, informing other people (about) things that they do offer. Like, they do offer text. It's called Taxi Scrip, for people (who are) low-income or have disabilities, where you can purchase it and utilize that to pay for taxis... I think they should have this stuff on the bus, pamphlets where you could easily grab and know that this is available to you so you can utilize it." - King County Participant*

A few shared that they had felt judged by others while commuting, and noted the need for community members to also be informed about how to be respectful or supportive to commuters with access needs.

*“I need to bring my special needs daughter. People aren't understanding of what's going on and usually get called names or get dirty looks.” - King County Participant*

## Human Infrastructure

Many participants mentioned that additional customer service points throughout their commute would improve their overall experience. Some participants called for an increase in official transit stewards to be available at popular transit centers to help with trip planning and troubleshooting, as well as promoting available programs and services.

*“What if they came out with some 24/7 person that could help you with your bus or trying to figure out the bus route because it's very limited right now... After [5 pm], you can't get a hold of anybody to find out what route you might need to take.” - Pierce County Resident*

*“I think they need more people answering the phones or they need something where you can text and get a response. Maybe that would be easier or quicker, something where it would be something that would help the person that's missed their bus, is stranded, and doesn't know what to do... especially if they're elderly or a kid.” - Snohomish County Resident*

*“Having transit ambassadors at the transit stations to help, you know, facilitate things. Ambassadors are huge. I think that could help with customer service.” - Kitsap County Resident*

## Access-Friendly Buses or Routes

One participant suggested having dedicated buses specifically for families with children or people with disabilities, in order to provide more assistance, patience, space, and to reduce judgment from other transit users.

*“A bus where they transport families with kids or people with disabilities... Because I've seen a lot of cases on the bus where moms or dads or grandma have kids with disabilities, and it's very challenging, and other people will seem like they were irritated, who didn't understand properly the challenge and what's going on.” - King County Participant*

## Physical Feature Improvements

A few participants who use a wheelchair shared their personal experience navigating transportation options and noted that additional consideration is needed for different levels of ability across all modes. They suggested that if the infrastructure isn't there to support their need, then they simply won't use the mode. In response to a comment about the lack of ADA-accessible bathrooms, one participant commented: *“If we can't go, we won't come.”* - Kitsap County Resident

*"If [I'm] traveling long distance, [I need to know] if the transit center has ADA bathrooms." - Kitsap County Resident*

*"For someone who lives on the island and uses a wheelchair, I actually try to set up my medical care in Seattle because it's easier for me to get around in Seattle without a car than it is to get around in Kitsap County." - Kitsap County Resident*

*"I think [people in wheelchairs] need better access [to buses]. People have to get up and give them their seats for them to sit where they need to be seated in the bus. I think they need more than... four seats. I think they need more than that." - King County Resident*

*"[The sidewalks are] uneven because you have all the frost heaves and whatnot, or you just don't have sidewalks at all. There are still blocks that don't have sidewalks at all, or the cutouts are old. You could tell they're old because they're straight down. They're 90 degrees easily and you don't want to... [be in] your wheelchair going down one of those. So I think that would make it much safer, easier to travel." - King County Resident*

Some participants say they rely on specialized transportation options and accommodations. For them, frequency and accessibility were primary concerns. They noted a lack of flexibility in coordinating paratransit and that options can be limited in less urban areas.

*"There is no wheelchair accessible taxi in the Bainbridge area, it's just not there. I know if I go to Seattle that there are at least two taxicab companies that have wheelchair accessible cabs, but there's nothing over here. I mean, we've had to go to just incredible lengths. I had a friend who used to be part of Bainbridge Corral, and she really wanted to hear one of their performances and we had to use this basically like a panel truck to get her there and get her in and out of it. I don't think it was really safe, but we didn't have any other alternative." - Kitsap County Resident*

*"Sometimes we just need a bus to the grocery store. I need to bring my special needs daughter. People aren't understanding what's going on and we usually get called names or get dirty looks if she has a meltdown." - King County Resident*

*"Let's say I want to go to Fred Meyer, then I want to go to Target, and then I want to go to the mall. You have to make reservations for each of those individually, and you have to have a half an hour window of when you can be picked up for each of those." - Kitsap County Resident*

*"Kitsap Access is wonderful, [unless] you don't make your appointment, I think it's 18 hours in advance. And they're not available on Sunday. I think they're available until 8 pm with the last pickup at 7:30." - Kitsap County Resident*

## In-Language Resources

Several participants expressed a need for more translated materials and broader in-language access to transit information. Multi-lingual bus drivers and customer service representatives were popular suggestions across discussions.

*"I think having language access on the bus would tremendously be helpful. From my experience, we've had one of our clients who was elderly and does not speak English and this individual does not know the bus route to get to their house. Or they would constantly forget due to, you know, aging and all that. So they got lost on the bus and they didn't know how to ask which bus was correct... so either having a driver that is multilingual or bilingual or having language support or a language access whenever needed for the riders, I think would be tremendously helpful." - King County Resident*

*"One other thing that I don't think we've mentioned when we talked about communication and signs and stuff like that, I think it's important that they not all be in English like we have a lot of Spanish speakers in this county, and I would like to see signs in Spanish." - Kitsap County Resident*

## Fair Fare Considerations

The cost of bus fare was frequently mentioned as a barrier to transit. Many participants recommended price reductions, and a few participants suggested that fares should be free for local travel.

*"I used to live in Des Moines, go to school in Shoreline, and work in Seattle. And it was easily six to seven hours [commuting], just depending on what time of day. And lots of money... Sometimes it's kind of crazy how much they want you to pay. And I get it. But you know, if you're not in the financial position, but you don't have another option, what are you supposed to do?" - Young Adult Participant*

*"It's hard to get around now because of the financial need. But even though Pierce County is one of the cheapest [areas] right now, it's only two bucks a ride versus in the other counties... but it's hard without money to get around town if they don't like to give you free rides." - Pierce County Resident*

*"When you're [paying bus fare] five days a week, it can chalk up to more than you would pay with a car and just gas expenses. And if you're doing that every week, it's basically the same as paying what you would pay for a car outside of maintenance." - Young Adult Participant*

*"I don't think [fares] should be free, but a dollar a person seems like a reasonable thing for each of us. So maybe I'm reducing the fares. That's not quite as expensive for people." - King County Resident*

*"Is the fare really fair?" - King County Resident*

*"I wish the bus fare would be free and accessible to everyone." - King County Resident*

Other participants suggested integrated fares across transit modes, or day passes to use across different legs of a multi-mode or multi-county commute.

*"I think there should be an all day pass option for buses. I knew it was an option at one time." - King County Resident*

*"I wish we had more integrated fares... You wouldn't have the ridiculous charge just to walk on a ferry, whether it's a King County water taxi or the state ferry system. I think we need a low income fare program and all of that." - Snohomish County Resident*

## Sense of Community

Some participants expressed that they are missing a sense of community and camaraderie in their commutes.

*"I took the subway and buses [in New York] with absolutely no problem because there's a community of folks who are just all trying to get around and you're all just kind of stuck in some spots. And so you develop relationships with your favorite taco truck here, your favorite coffee guy there... That was the difference between, 'I'm going to take the car today because I just don't feel like missing the ferry' versus 'I'll just give it a go.'" - Kitsap County Resident*

*"The Seattle Ferry Terminal has been a nightmare since the entire renovation. It used to actually be more of a communal space where you could go in, you could go get a cup of coffee, you could meet people there. There was something that you could do with your time instead of just standing in like a cold container bin for an hour." - Kitsap County Resident*

## Related Insights

### Housing Cost and Displacement

We asked participants at the end of each focus group if there was anything else they wanted to share related to their experience using transportation options through the region. Some participants reflected on their experience with housing affordability and displacement. We heard that access to affordable housing implicitly influences many transportation needs, choices, and challenges.

*"The affordability of housing dictates where people live and how they travel around. So one thing I see is having affordable neighborhoods, desirable neighborhoods that people want to move to." - Snohomish County Resident*



*"I think the reason why we have such traffic nightmares is because people are living further and further from where they work... I think people just living closer really would solve a lot of problems." - Snohomish County Resident*

*"We also need housing, especially for low-income and disabled people close to transit hubs. The saddest irony is that it gets so expensive to try to house yourself near a light rail station... But the people that really need that to access work and get off of disability and rejoin the workforce and be members, the community needs low-income housing close to transit hubs." - Snohomish County Resident*

The draft 2022 Regional Transportation Plan cites PSRC's VISION 2050 goal of continuing to develop near high-capacity stations. The Plan states that "It is important that convenient, safe, and multimodal access to transit be a primary focus in redevelopment... Maintaining existing and creating new affordable housing near transit stations will be key to ensuring that transit-dependent populations will have easy access to the expanding transit network," (31-32). This goal is in line with addressing the concerns that some participants shared regarding development-induced displacement.

## Workplace Implications

In the Snohomish County session, participants commented on workplace implications to their commute, and shared a number of recommendations for employer and employee considerations related to commuting, including hybrid- or work-from-home options, staggered shift start times, satellite offices, and relocating organizations outside urban areas.

*"I don't know if there's any way to incentivize either employers or employees to be closer to where they work... At the end of the day, we need to get some cars off the road. I think that's really the biggest challenge is how do you get cars off the road?" - Snohomish County Resident*

*"I think companies can help with traffic, not only promoting remote access, but also creating hubs. If they analyze where their workers really are located and if they're located outside an area, perhaps they can have workspaces available for their staff to go to that's near those areas where their workers are. So they're there, their buildings become decentralized." - Snohomish County Resident*

*"Encourage businesses to locate in areas that are closer to where people actually live. So encouraging some business development in these areas... looking at where more people live and supporting businesses that are opening there, especially businesses that are going to be creating family wage jobs." - Snohomish County Resident*

*"Maybe incentivizing employers to encourage folks to either work from home or to go to work at different times... That changes the rush hour times and that takes the load off those hours." - Snohomish County Resident*

One participant suggested that new features on buses might help commuters blend their workday into their commute time to promote workplace flexibility.

*"I know some employers like Microsoft have their buses or vans pick people up from different locations... [and the buses have] Wi-Fi and... a little flip out desk, kind of like a tray table like you would see on an airplane." - Snohomish County Resident*

## Examples from Other Regions

Participants were asked if they had experienced anything from outside our region that they'd like to see integrated into our transportation system here.

A few participants familiar with Bay Area Rapid Transit ([BART](#)) in California recommended it as a model for rapid transit in the Puget Sound region. BART is a rapid transit system serving the San Francisco Bay Area in California via 50 stations along six routes of rapid transit lines. There were an average of 412,596 weekday passengers pre-pandemic (first quarter fiscal year 2020).



*"I would want to do something like BART from Olympia all the way to Bellingham. Something like that would really alleviate a lot of what's going on." - Snohomish County Resident*

*"I really believe in a BART-type system in this area. It's safe, it's everything that the environmentalists would like. It would reduce traffic immensely. It's something that could run 24/7." - Snohomish County Resident*

*Since I have to get around quite a bit, it will probably be by car, but I would prefer something like BART or light rail. That would be my main choice." - Snohomish County Resident*

A participant familiar with subway systems in the eastern United States and in Europe expressed that there is an opportunity to model our link light rail system on underground subway systems.



*“I was able to go to New York City and London and Paris at different times, and they all had underground subway type systems and, kind of like how parts of our light rail are. I find those to be quick, easy, fast, you know? Even the underground aspect of it, where it's, it's not obtrusive into everything else that's going on in the street and doesn't disrupt as much.” - King County Resident*

For context, the New York City Subway is a rapid transit system that operates 24/7 via 472 stations and 28 routes throughout the boroughs of Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx. [The Métro de Paris](#) is a rapid transit system in the Paris metropolitan area that operates 304 stations and 16 lines, most of which are underground.

## Future Research

PSRC is in a unique position to drive future engagement efforts among the region's elected officials to inform transportation strategies and decisions. One participant suggested that PSRC facilitate a “tour” of a multi-mode or multi-legged commute round trip for legislators so that they can fully understand what super-commuters are experiencing today.

*“I think everyone should try... a multi bus commute or see what that feels like, because it really brings home how difficult it is to get around the region... See what that feels like and what you have to navigate and all the different things that can compound to make your commute worse.” - Young Adult Participant*

As PSRC continues to explore how people would prefer to move around the Puget Sound region, there several opportunities for additional study, including:

- Perspective and experience of non-English speaking communities (our focus groups were conducted in English).
- Perspective and experience of new residents (we spoke to mostly people who have lived in the region for 5+ years).
- Exploration of additional transit options (e.g., carpool/vanpool) and mode definitions (i.e., “high speed rail”).

In future community engagement efforts, PSRC might consider pursuing an interview method in addition to focus group formats to allow participants to engage how they're most comfortable (whether in a group or one-on-one), enabling insight from participants who may not have time to participate in a full focus group discussion.

## Appendix A: The Real Cost of Commuting

Between December 2020 and June 2021, TVA conducted focus groups with community members who have experience with housing instability and/or homelessness. Our goal was to ground truth in PSRC's Regional Housing Needs Assessment and provide input on the Regional Housing Strategy. Participants noted similar concerns to our current focus group participants related to the real cost of commuting on their health, finances, careers, families, communities, and environment. The following section is excerpted from **“Pathways to Stable Housing, Choice, and Ownership,”** a September 2021 report issued by The Vida Agency outlining community recommendations on the Puget Sound Regional Council's Regional Housing Strategy.

# The Real Cost of Commuting

Participants reviewed preliminary data showing that one in three residents live and work in different counties, a finding they considered consistent with their lived experience in the region. Further, they shared that travel within their own city can sometimes take just as long.

*"Waking up at four in the morning takes something out of your soul. And then commuting back home in traffic." - Regional Housing Focus Group Participant*

*"Even if you're in the same county, if you're not able to live in the area you work then there's a cost." - Regional Housing Focus Group Participant*

*"There's a missed opportunity of wealth building in our communities." - Regional Housing Focus Group Participant*

*"I lived in West Seattle and worked in Ballard and had to commute on public transit to get there by five a.m. without buses running regularly." - Regional Housing Focus Group Participant*

Subjects discussed what the actual and opportunity costs are of living in a different county than they work, including:

## Loss of Time

Most participants shared about the loss of time and length of time away from their family due to long commutes between work, childcare, errands, and home.

*"I'm up in the morning and it's dark, I come back and it's dark, and the only thing you can do is eat, sleep, and shit." - Regional Housing Focus Group Participant*

One participant noted that the Covid-19 pandemic has created an environment where they, for the time being, are able to spend more time with family.

*"Because of the pandemic, we've been at home and get all this time to make dinner for my kids, not rushing to grab them from daycare." - Regional Housing Focus Group Participant*

## Loss of Connection

Many participants shared that the time lost in commuting and away from the neighborhood they live in reduces their ability to form connections, date or build a family, and participate locally in the ways they would like to.

*"When you don't own any part of where you live, you don't control the placemaking." - Regional Housing Focus Group Participant*

*"You miss out on the life that you should be enjoying." - Regional Housing Focus Group Participant*

*“You don't have time to volunteer, you can't participate in your kid's activities, you can't be connected to anything going on locally.” - Regional Housing Focus Group Participant*

*“There's a loss of connection to the community where you work and where you live. If you're a daytime resident, is that a part of your community? Do you have time to establish relationship there? Same thing about being at home, if you're spending the majority of your time away, are you really able to build those relationships in the community you live in?” - Regional Housing Focus Group Participant*

## Physical and Mental Health Impact

Most participants noted an impact related to their health, whether from the physical strain of sitting for long commutes, lack of time for exercise or to cook healthy meals, short windows for sleep, or increased risk of traffic accidents (due to length of exposure on roadways). Overall, participants felt that long commutes cost them their peace of mind.

*“There's a physical strain on your body from the lack of exercise, the stagnant time we spend commuting.” - Regional Housing Focus Group Participant*

*“It costs your sanity if you don't have those ways to destress.” - Regional Housing Focus Group Participant*

*“If I had to be in the office by eight a.m. then I had to be up by 4:30 to get up, make lunches, and commute 2 hours.” - Regional Housing Focus Group Participant*

*“I used to have that commute and I would cry every morning. A job couldn't pay me enough to do that again.” - Regional Housing Focus Group Participant*

## Environmental Impact

Several participants raised concerns about the environmental impact of driving or commuting long distances regularly. Subjects noted the impact on the local environment, as well as on themselves and the humans that live nearby roadways.

*“There's a lot of energy to get People of Color to care about plastic bags. But if we could afford to live fifteen minutes from work it would lower our carbon footprint more than anything.” - Regional Housing Focus Group Participant*

## Financial Costs

Several participants noted that the cost of maintaining their vehicle is an added expense to their cost of living, and increases the wear and tear on their car overall.

*“My car won't last as long. Plus there's more oil changes.” - Regional Housing Focus Group Participant*