



**2021
Whatcom
Public
Engagement
Survey**

Final Report

April 2023



whatcom council of governments

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1. Introduction

The Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG) conducted a large-scale public engagement survey with Whatcom County residents in April and May of 2021. The purpose of the questionnaire was to inform the update of the Whatcom Regional Transportation Plan that was completed in 2022. *The Way to Go, Whatcom: 2045 Regional / Metropolitan Transportation Plan* was approved October, 2022 and is available at the website: www.waytogowhatcom.org.

Previous updates of Whatcom County jurisdictional plans have been informed by public input, but no survey of public opinion regarding transportation investments has been done across all jurisdictions since the early 1990's.

The invaluable feedback from this survey will do more than inform Whatcom region's transportation plan. All cities and the County are also updating their transportation plans in 2025. The survey results, grouped by jurisdiction when appropriate, provide an opportunity to inform policies, strategies, and goals.

Survey Platform

Several internet-based survey platforms were evaluated for this effort. After review, MetroQuest was selected based on its alignment with transportation planning outreach, intuitive interface, mapping features, and customer support.

Outreach

WCOG promoted the survey with the following efforts:

- **Postcards** - A third of all Whatcom County residential addresses, randomly selected, received a postcard in the mail with easy-to-understand instructions on how to take the survey. In addition, for U.S. Postal Service carrier routes in census-tracts of low-income and traditionally under-represented ethnic groups, 100% of addresses received a postcard. The total mailing list was over 40,000 households.
- **Press release** - A press release regarding the survey effort was distributed to regional media sources, along with a press kit.
- **Social media** - Information and links to the survey were provided on Facebook, LinkedIn, NextDoor, and Twitter.
- **Partner websites and social media** - The City of Bellingham, Whatcom County, the Whatcom Housing Alliance, Western Washington University (WWU), and the WA State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) all shared information about the survey on their online platforms.

A printed version of the questionnaire was made for those who could not or did not want to use the online version, and for those with visual impairment (to be used in conjunction with a screen reader). A Spanish language version of the online survey was also developed.

At the conclusion of the survey period at the end of May, over 2,000 responses were recorded.

Funding

The survey effort cost \$104,635. A summary breakdown of costs is below:

- MetroQuest subscription: \$15,000
- Postcard design, printing, and mailing: \$14,850
- Translation services: \$300
- Data post-processing: \$4,485
- Staff time: \$70,000

Survey Format & Questions

The questionnaire was drafted by WCOG staff and subsequently revised with review and input from regional jurisdictions that participate in the Whatcom County Transportation Technical Advisory Group (TTAG); Board Members of the Whatcom Transportation Policy Board; local transportation and planning staff; and members of the public not affiliated with any of the above groups.

The objectives of the questionnaire were to:

- Hear from the region’s residents what their transportation network priorities were - in their own terms
- Collect this feedback in a way that could be used to update the region’s transportation system goals
- Quick to complete (under ten minutes)
- Easy to use (for the online version)
- Include visual aids to explain certain transportation concepts (i.e. access vs. equity)
- Include a mapping component for respondents to mark transportation elements of note: home, work, school, and errand locations; and locations where transportation challenges exist
- Collect the data in a format that is easy to post-process, analyze, and share with partner agencies
- Provide a Spanish language version
- Allow for user privacy

The survey included questions about about respondents’ opinions regarding the region as a whole. The objective of the survey structure was to collect generalized feedback on living in this region, priorities for quality of life and transportation needs, then to gather specific input on transportation challenges and origin/destination patterns.

The full questionnaire is available as **Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire**. The questions asked of survey respondents are listed below. Any question with (O) designated was an open-ended question that allowed respondents to fill in a response in paragraph form.

- How long have you lived in Whatcom County?
- What about the region, or future change, would cause you to consider moving away? (O)
- What would make you consider moving away from the region? (O)
- Please select the 3 public investment categories that are most important to you:
 - Health
 - Safety/emergency response
 - Schools
 - Managing land use
 - Judicial/legal
 - Environment
 - Transportation
 - Economic development
 - Recreation and parks
- What do you believe are the most important outcomes for society that should result from public investments in transportation? Please list one or two. (O)
- What are one or two things you would ask our elected officials to do to achieve the outcomes you listed in the previous question? (O)
- Based on the trips that you make – walking, driving, biking, bus, etc. – what is a part of the transportation system that works well? (O)
- Based on the trips that you make – walking, driving, biking, bus, etc. – what is a part of the transportation system that doesn’t work as well as you would like? (O)

- Which changes have occurred for you or others in your household during the COVID pandemic? Select all that apply:
 - Reduced work-trips due to job loss or reduced work.
 - Reduced work-trips because working from home.
 - Reduced school trips because of remote learning.
 - Increased use of home delivery.
 - Increased use of curbside pick-up options.
 - Increased walking and/or biking.
 - Decreased use of public transit.
 - Other: (O)
- Which COVID-related travel changes do you expect you'll stick with – even after the COVID pandemic is over? Select all that apply:
 - Fewer work trips because working at home more
 - More home delivery in place of trips to stores
 - Decreased use of public transit
 - Increased walking and/or biking
 - Other: (O)
- This section lists currently adopted regional and state transportation goals (in no particular order). Please assign 5 of the 8 goals below a rank-number that you believe it should have relative to the others – 1 (highest), 2, 3, 4, 5 (lowest):
 - Environment and climate – climate, air, water, habitat, etc.
 - Safety – Continued reduction of crashes and resulting death and injury
 - Freight – Movement of goods and services, utility vehicles, etc.
 - Access – The basic ability to travel to a destination as well as the principle that our transportation systems should be equally usable by all people
 - Economic vitality – Transportation systems that support people's and businesses' travel and freight connections to jobs, customers, and transactions for goods and services
 - Multi-modal system – Facilities and operations for multiple types of transportation that work together: driving, buses, biking, walking, ride hailing services
 - Mobility – The quality of travel: trip time predictability, reliability comfort
 - Preservation – Keeping existing infrastructure and systems in good repair
- Please give an approximate location of your home.
- Thinking about transportation, what do you like most about this location? (O)
- Again, regarding transportation, what do you like least about this location? (O)
- Please give the location of your work destination(s).
- Typical (pre-COVID) type of transportation for this work trip:
 - Drive alone
 - Walk
 - Bike
 - Bus
 - Carpool/vanpool
 - Other (O)
- Please give the location of your school destination(s).
- Type of school?
 - Preschool or kindergarten
 - Elementary or middle school
 - High school
 - College or professional training
 - Other (O)
- Typical (pre-COVID) type of transportation for this work trip:
 - Walk
 - Bike
 - School bus or WTA bus
 - Carpool/vanpool
 - Drive alone or driven by adult
 - Other (O)
- Please give the locations (address, nearby intersection, commonly known place, etc.) of some of your other regular destinations.

- Type of destination:
 - Medical/healthcare
 - Recreation
 - Shopping
 - Dine out
 - Entertainment
 - Other (O)
- Typical (pre-COVID) type of transportation for this trip:
 - Drive
 - Walk
 - Bike
 - Bus
 - Uber/Lyft/taxi, etc.
 - Carpool
 - Other (O)
- Please give locations (intersection, road, trail, nearby businesses, etc.) of transportation challenges that you are aware of or experience.
- What kind of challenge?
 - Congestion
 - Safety
 - Poor infrastructure condition
 - Walking or bicycle access
 - Bus service
 - Freight access
 - Environmental impact
 - Other (O)
- Please give a brief description of the transportation challenge. (O)
- What is your age?
 - Under 18
 - 18-24
 - 25-34
 - 35-44
 - 45-54
 - 55-64
 - 65-74
 - 74+
- What ethnicity do you identify as?
 - Native American or Alaska Native
 - White
 - Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin
 - Black or African American
 - Asian
 - Middle Easterner or North African
 - Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
 - Other ethnicity or origin (O)
 - Prefer not to answer
- What is your annual household income?
 - Less than \$25,000
 - \$25,000-\$49,000
 - \$50,000-\$74,000
 - \$75,000-\$99,000
 - \$100,000-\$200,000
 - \$200,000 or greater
- Transportation needs: Does you or anyone in your household:
 - Use a mobility device (e.g. walker, wheelchair, etc.)?
 - Have a disability that prevents you/them from driving?
- Please share your email address if we may invite your feedback on one or two follow-up questions as we draft the regional plan. We'll also send you a link to the overall results of this survey when completed.

2. Who took the survey?

1,970 individual responses were received. These respondents provided the majority of data in this report, and represent a survey response rate of approximately 5% out of all households that received a mailing.

Age

Figure 1: Age of respondents compared to Whatcom County population

n=1,307

Census =229,247

Source: WA State Office of Financial Management

Age	Survey	Census
18-24	3%	10%
25-34	12%	13%
35-44	14%	12%
45-54	16%	11%
55-64	20%	12%
65-74	26%	11%
75 or older	9%	7%

The majority of survey respondents were older, with 46% being at or above 55 years of age. 35% of respondents are of retirement age (65 and older). The survey had higher representation of all age groups aged 35 and above as compared to U.S. Census data for Whatcom County. Survey respondents also under-represented the 18-24 age group by 7%. The high proportion of older respondents as compared to the actual population of Whatcom County is important to note, as their opinions may differ from younger generations to whom future planning efforts are benefitting.

Ethnicity

Figure 2: Ethnicity of respondents compared to Whatcom County population

n=1,277

Census = 182,483

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Census Redistricting Data

Ethnicity	Survey	Census
White	83%	80%
Prefer not to answer	8%	NA
Other ethnicity or origin	3%	7%
Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	2%	NA
Asian	2%	6%
Native American or Alaska Native	1%	4%
Black or African American	0%	2%
Native Hawaiian or other Pac. Isldr.	0%	0%
Middle Easterner or North African	0%	NA

Part of survey outreach efforts included a push to get more respondents from ethnically diverse communities. Despite these efforts, some ethnic minorities within Whatcom County were under-represented in the survey response.

Most respondents identified as white (83%). The next largest group of respondents chose not to answer the question (8%), leaving only 5% of respondents that identified as either Hispanic, Latino, Spanish, Asian, Native American, Alaska Native, or other ethnic identity.

Although 2020 U.S. Census data do not break out the same ethnicities as those listed in the public engagement survey, the results represent close to an accurate demographic picture of the ethnic make-up of Whatcom County. The most under-represented group in the survey are Native Americans and Alaska natives.

Income

Figure 3: Income of respondents compared to Whatcom County population

n=1,147

Census = 88,794

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Census Redistricting Data

Income	Survey	Census
Less than \$25,000	11%	16%
\$25,000 - \$49,000	20%	18%
\$50,000 - \$74,000	22%	20%
\$75,000 - \$99,000	18%	16%
\$100,000 - \$200,000	24%	24%
\$200,000 or greater	5%	6%

The distribution of respondents by income bracket resembles U.S. Census data for Whatcom County. Only the population making less than \$25,000 were under-represented.

Length of residence in Whatcom County

Figure 4: Length of residence of respondents

n=1,128

Length of Residence	
0 - 5 years	23%
6 - 10 years	11%
11 - 20 years	20%
More than 20 years	46%

Nearly half of respondents to the survey are long-term residents, living in the region for over twenty years (46%). 23% of respondents are new to the area, having moved here less than five years ago.

Usage of mobility devices

Of all survey respondents, 110 indicated that they or someone in their household uses a mobility device such as a walker or wheelchair. 107 respondents reported that they or someone in their household have a disability that prevents them from driving.

This is a high percentage of respondents (11% of total surveyed). The large number of responses likely relates to the disproportionate percentage of elderly respondents to the survey. While the numbers may not be beneficial in establishing a regional mobility trend, they do provide insight into a specific group of system users who cannot drive and/or need to access locations with a mobility device.

Residence

Figure 5: Residence of respondents compared to Whatcom County population

n=1,258

Census =226,300

Source: WA State Office of Financial Management

Jurisdiction	Survey	Census
Bellingham	61.1%	39.7%
Blaine	1.7%	2.7%
Everson	0.5%	1.3%
Ferndale	2.0%	6.9%
Lynden	3.8%	7.0%
Nooksack	0.2%	0.7%
Sumas	0.1%	0.8%
Whatcom County	30.6%	41.0%

Figure 6: Number of respondents compared to Whatcom County population

n=1,891

Census =226,300

Source: WA State Office of Financial Management

Jurisdiction	Survey	Census	%
Bellingham	1,084	89,860	1.2%
Blaine	63	6,020	1.0%
Everson	16	2,935	0.5%
Ferndale	74	15,570	0.5%
Lynden	81	15,930	0.5%
Nooksack	3	1,515	0.2%
Sumas	4	1,740	0.2%
Whatcom County	566	92,730	0.6%

61% of respondents live in Bellingham, the largest city in Whatcom County. Residents of unincorporated Whatcom County residents made up the second-largest single jurisdiction response.

Despite outreach efforts, small cities had a relatively lower response rate. Survey results from the smaller cities are closer to their proportion of the overall population.

Figure 7: Residence of Bellingham respondents compared to city population

n=749

City =84,818

Source: City of Bellingham

Bellingham Neighborhood	Survey	City
Alabama Hill	5.3%	3.5%
Barkley	5.2%	5.6%
Birchwood	5.6%	6.4%
City Center	2.5%	3.1%
Columbia	7.7%	4.9%
Cordata	8.1%	7.7%
Cornwall Park	1.7%	2.6%
Edgemoor	2.5%	2.5%
Fairhaven	0.4%	1.8%
Happy Valley	9.3%	8.2%
Irongate	0.1%	0.0%
King Mountain	0.5%	3.2%
Lettered Streets	4.4%	3.4%
Meridian	2.8%	4.4%
Puget	5.6%	6.9%
Roosevelt	7.5%	7.5%
Samish	5.5%	4.4%
Sehome	5.9%	4.6%
Silver Beach	2.3%	4.1%
South	3.3%	2.1%
South Hill	4.1%	4.2%
Sunnyland	2.9%	2.9%
Western Wash. U.	0.9%	0.0%
Whatcom Falls	1.5%	3.0%
York	4.0%	3.2%

Within the City of Bellingham, respondents have been further parsed to the neighborhood level. Results were close to the actual population distribution of residents in the city.



3. Values and priorities for the region

Establishing goals for a new plan

While the previous regional transportation plan had seven goals based on public input, the cited public dialog these goals are based on took place twenty years ago. This survey sought to update what Whatcom County residents prioritize in the transportation system and the region in general to provide an updated look toward future planning and investments.

Broader contextual questions were asked about the values underpinning peoples' choice to live in the Whatcom region; how they rank transportation relative to other public investment needs; what they expect to result from transportation investments (goals); recommendations of what elected officials may do to advance those goals; and finally, a ranking of the goals currently listed in the transportation plan.

Based on the open-ended responses, categories and sub-categories were developed based on the frequency of the response. The vast majority of responses were then batched into these categories.

Living in Whatcom County

Respondents were asked why they live in Whatcom County. While transportation is not mentioned in this question, the feedback may pertain to those themes that transportation can support and/or that transportation investments should take care not to harm. Responses are shown in **Figure 8**.

Many respondents gave multiple reasons for living here. In instances where more than one reason was given, the first listed is the one that was recorded as the top-of-mind priority for the respondent. However it is important to note that, while quality of life or environmental opportunities may be most influential, other categories compel many other respondents to live here as well.

Also it is important to note that many of the categories created from the responses include some overlap - i.e. a comment may reply "natural habitat" which could fall under both environment and quality of life.

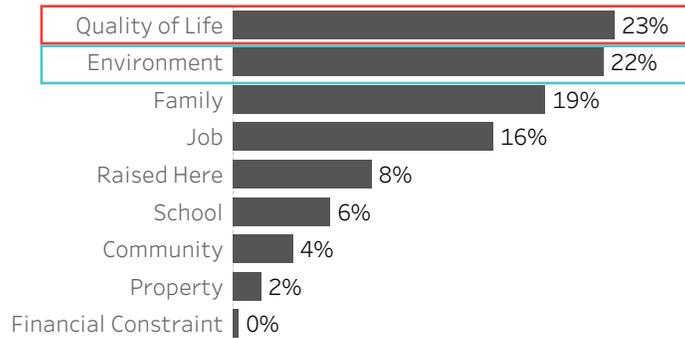
Retirement is listed as a subcategory in almost all categories, showing its prevalence in determining why respondents live here. This ties in with the older age demographic of respondents.

"Proximity to another region" usually notes a reference to Canada.

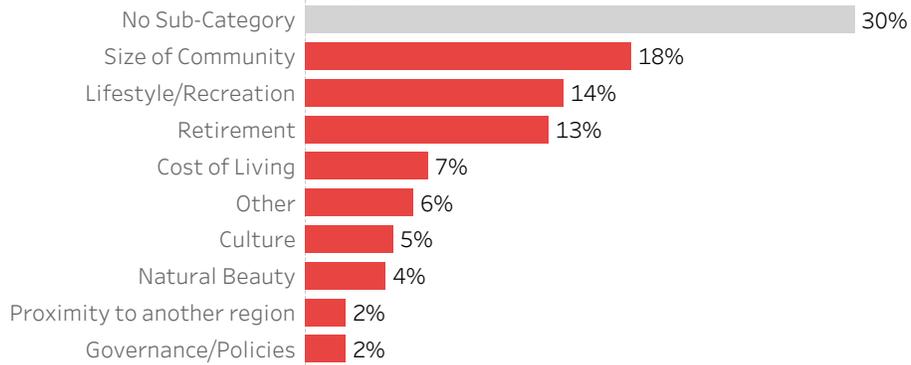


Figure 8: Primary reason you live in Whatcom County

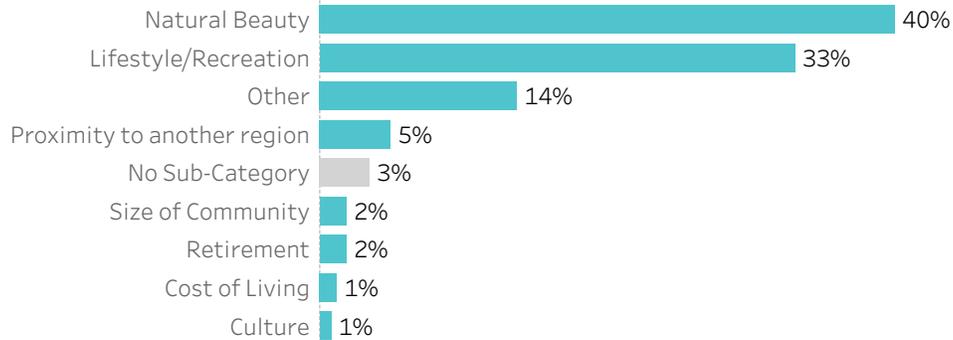
n=1,212



Quality of life subcategories



Environment subcategories

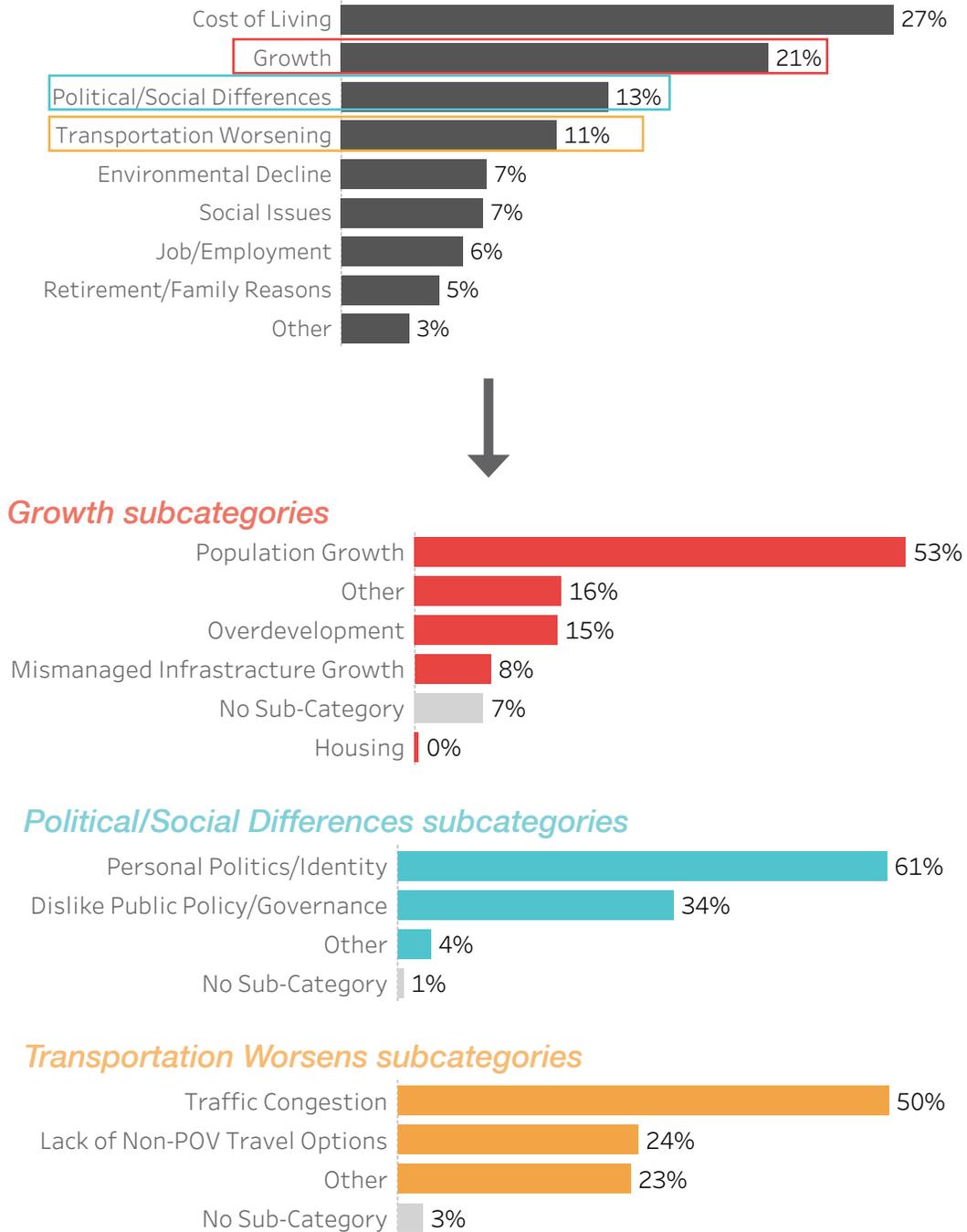


Concerns (values at risk)

Respondents were asked what about the region, or future change, would cause them to consider moving away. Like the first question, this one also investigates the values that support people’s decision to live here - but through the perspective of problems that are seen as a motive to prompt moving away from Whatcom County. Again, this feedback pertains to the broader, quality of life themes and conditions that transportation can support or influence. Responses are shown in **Figure 9**.

Figure 9: Reasons to move away from Whatcom County

n=1,212



The most common concern overall related to the cost of living (27%), with population growth (21%) the second-largest concern. Transportation-specific concerns made up 11% of respondents' answers to the question, with congestion being predominant. This ties in well with concerns about population growth.

Public investment priorities

Respondents were asked to characterize the investments that could advance their goals for the region. Not only were they asked to identify specific outcomes, but they were also asked what elected officials shall do to achieve those outcomes.

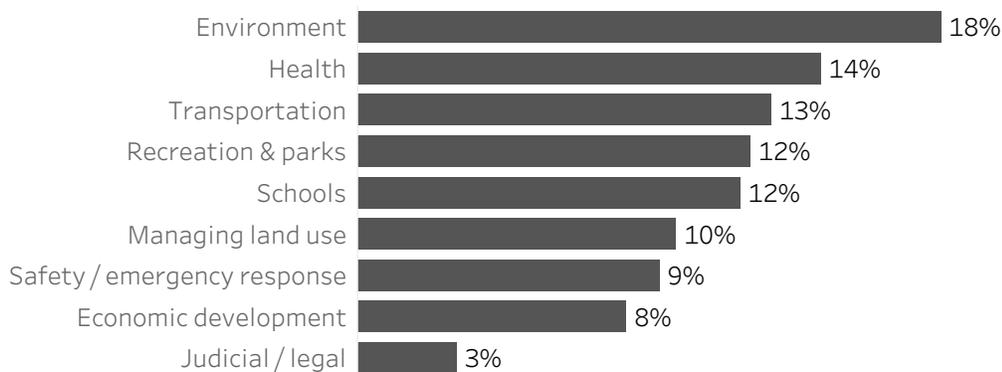
Like the previous questions, answers weren't specific to transportation, although transportation was listed as a potential investment category. Respondents were asked to identify a total of three public investment categories that were most important.

As **Figure 10** illustrates the environment was the most common selected priority for investment. The next most important investment category was health, followed by transportation. It is worth noting that the strong response to health may be influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic, perhaps even more so during the survey period in April and May of 2021, when COVID-19 vaccines were just starting to become more widely available to all adults.

Figure 10: Priorities for public investment

n=1,248

Note: Respondents could choose three options



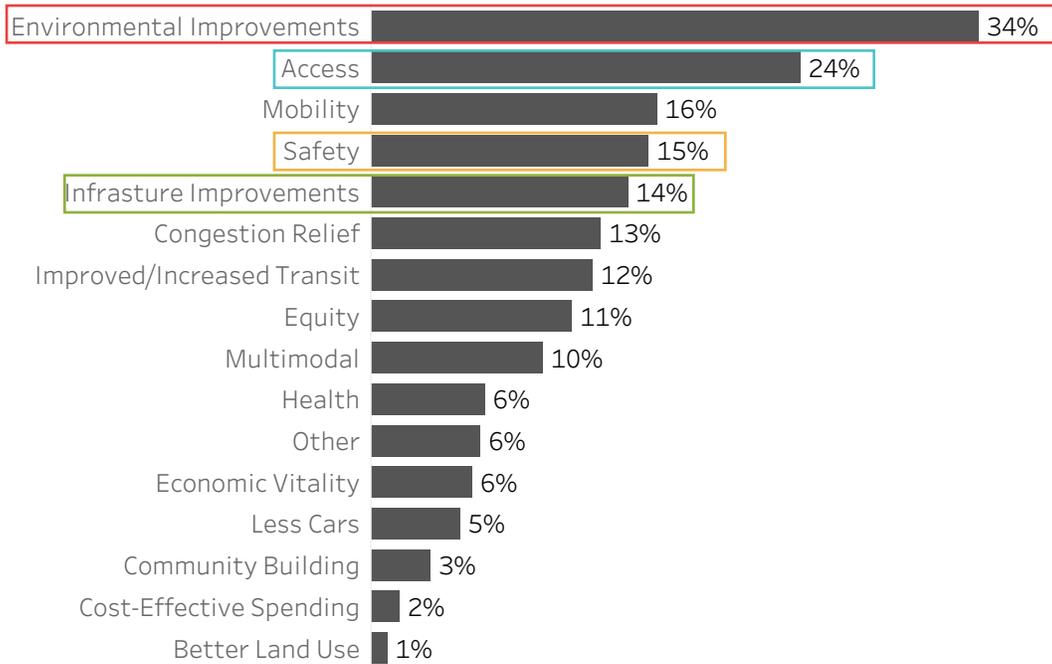
Transportation investments

Specific to transportation, respondents were asked what they believe were the most important outcomes to pursue with our public investments in transportation. They were able to give two responses. As with previous open-ended questions, responses were batched into categories and, depending on the level of detail in the responses, sub-categories were also created. Results are shown in **Figure 11**.

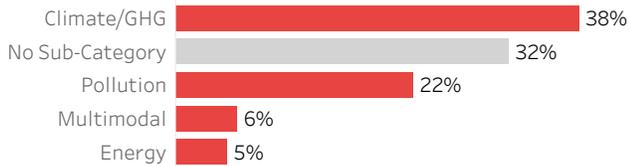
Terms used in the current list of regional transportation goals were used when appropriate (i.e. access, multimodal safety, etc.), but when the number of similar responses warranted a new category, those were created and used in summaries (i.e. improved/increased transit).

Figure 11: Outcomes of investments into transportation

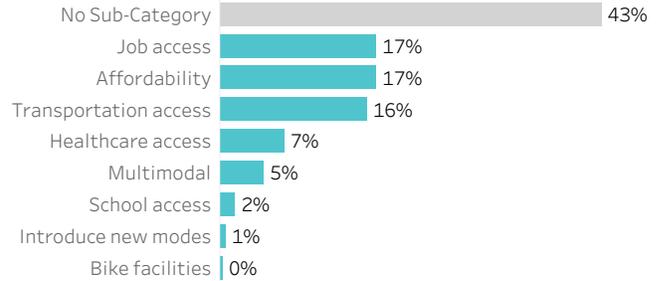
n=1,208



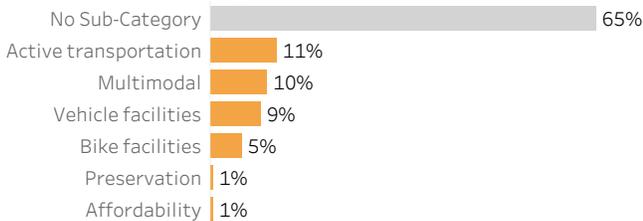
Environmental subcategories



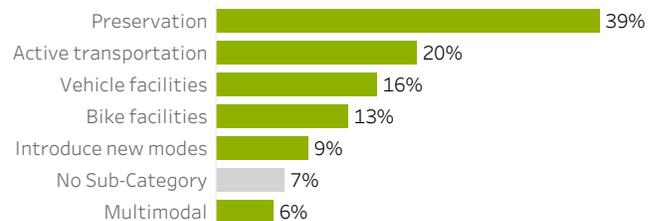
Access subcategories



Safety subcategories



Infrastructure subcategories



Actions by elected officials

Respondents were asked to offer ideas on how elected officials (local, state, and federal) could best advance their previously stated priority outcomes. The question was intended to identify or relate to one or more of the primary functions that elected representatives conduct on behalf of their constituents (e.g., budgeting, regulation, legislation, taxes and revenue, etc.). However the answers received were predominantly statements of support or project-level actions (89%). One such example is: “Elected officials could advance improvements to transit by ensuring transit is improved” or “constructing better bus stops.”

Thus, most of the responses were categorized as **Policy** - an indicator of emphasis but not specific actions by a legislator/ legislature. Other categories that did indicate specific actions by elected officials are **Allocation Increase** - moving *existing* resources/funding to advance an outcome (many respondents may have been advocating for new revenue but the conservative assumption, unless they described new revenue, was that they were advocating for a *reallocation of existing revenue*); **Revenue** - generating additional funding through taxes or fees; **Regulation/Legislation**; and **Allocation Decrease** - for example, some respondents advocated reducing funding for bike lanes. Response percentages are shown in **Figure 12**.

Figure 12: Types of action strategies

n=1,378

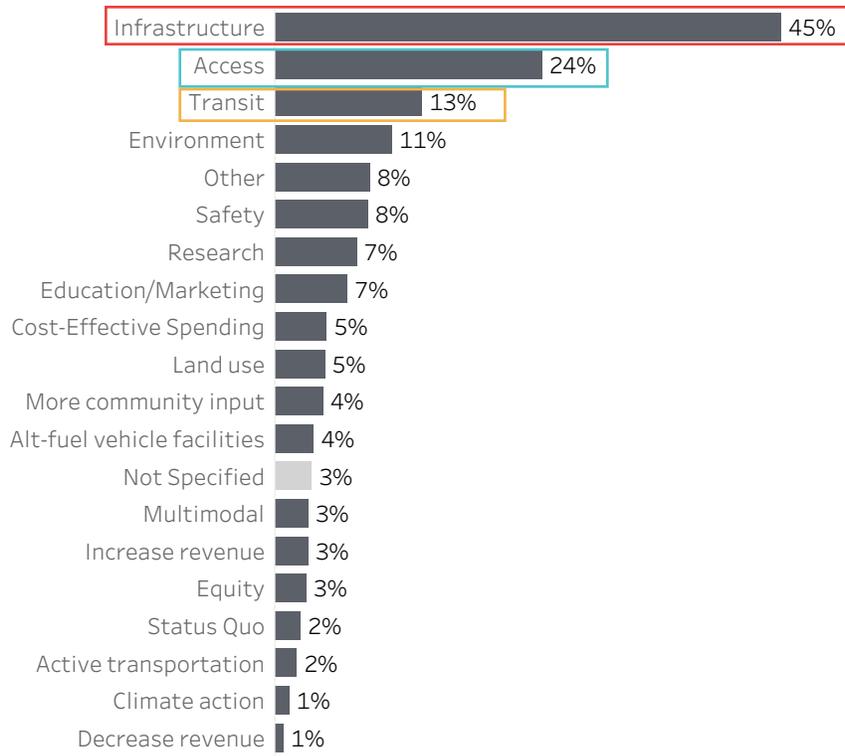
Policy	75%
Allocation Increase	14%
Revenue	4%
N/A	3%
Regulation/Legislation	2%
Allocation Decrease	1%

Action strategy responses were subcategorized at two levels to provide a clearer understanding of specific transportation priorities and actions. Subcategorization is shown in **Figure 13**. By far, the largest action strategy is focused on infrastructure improvements (45%) and within this category, bicycle infrastructure is highlighted (27%) with infrastructure improvements for cars and active transportation (all active modes: bike, pedestrian, trails), along with an interest in preservation, were all tied at 16%.

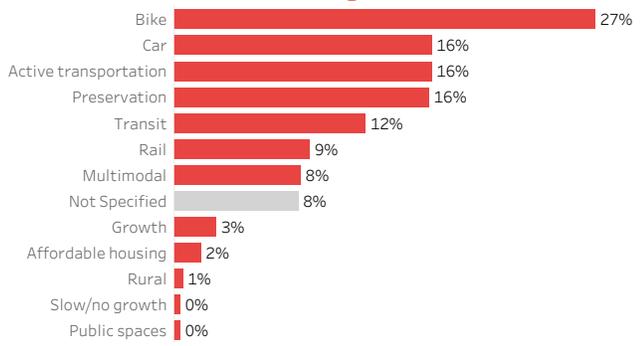


Figure 13: Specific strategies for elected officials

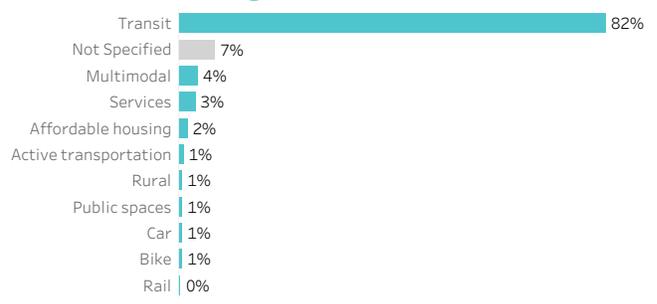
n=1,152



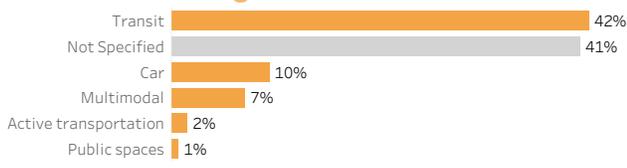
Infrastructure subcategories



Access subcategories



Transit subcategories



Prioritizing regional and state transportation goals

The previous regional plan, *Whatcom Mobility 2040*, had eight transportation priority goals. These goals were developed by aggregating the most commonly listed transportation goals of the jurisdictions within Whatcom County that are listed in the local comprehensive plans. However an effort to refresh these goals based in public participation hasn't been done since 1999.

In addition to gathering earlier feedback on what our goals for transportation investments should be, respondents were subsequently asked to evaluate our region's **existing** transportation system goals.

To see how the existing ranking of transportation goals may be updated by current public opinion, respondents were asked to select five of the eight goals **they** considered most important and arrange them in order of priority. Detailed descriptions of each goal, along with a photo, were included in the survey.

Existing Goals

Safety: Continued reduction of crashes and resulting death and injury



Environment & climate: Climate, air, water, habitat, etc.



Preservation: Keeping existing infrastructure and systems in good repair



Mobility: The quality of travel-trip time predictability, reliability, comfort



Multi-modal system: Facilities/operations for multiple transportation types that work together: cars, buses, bikes, walking, ride hailing



Access: The basic ability to travel to a destination and the principle that transportation systems should be equally usable by all people



Freight: Movement of goods and services, utility vehicles, etc.



Economic vitality*: Transportation systems that support travel and freight connections to jobs, customers, and transactions for goods and services



**Economic Vitality was the only Washington State legislative transportation priority not included in the Whatcom Mobility 2040 plan as a regional goal, so was added to the list for this question.*

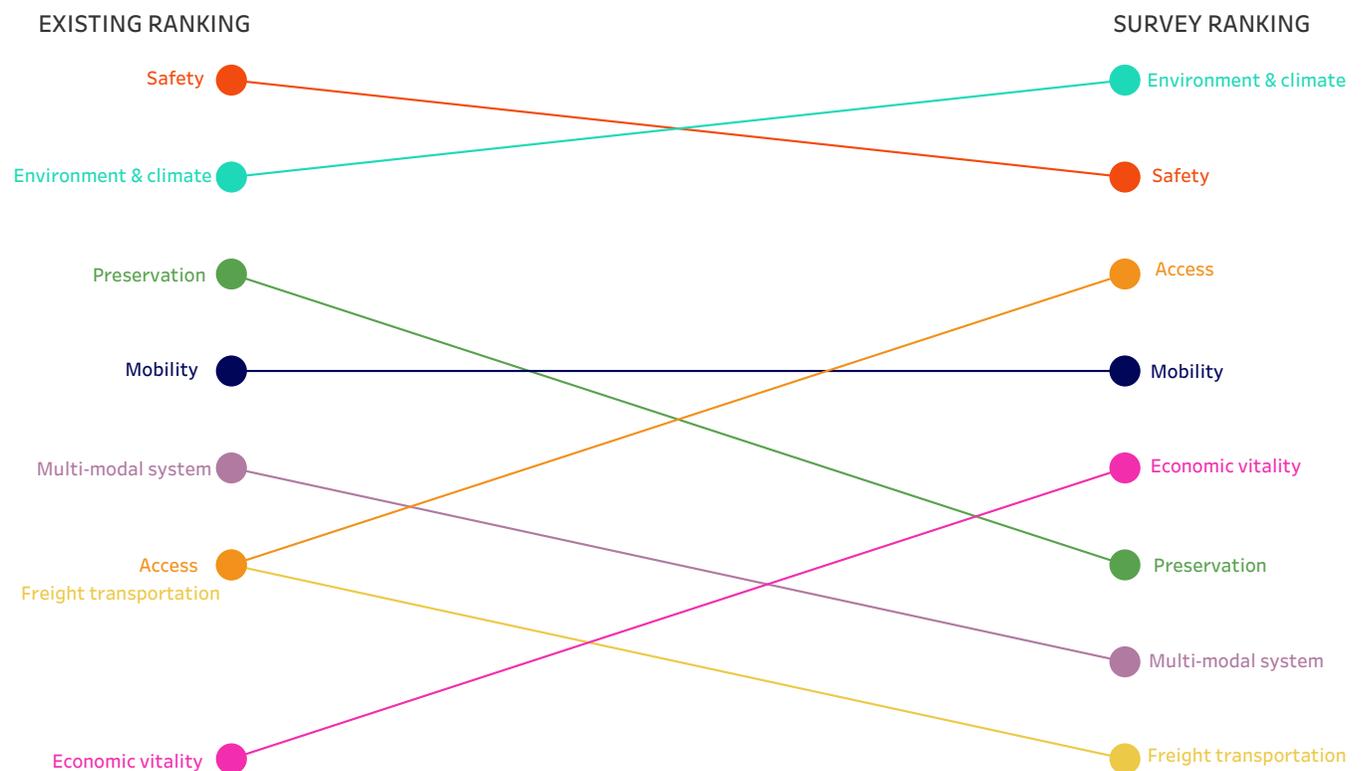
Survey respondents collectively ranked the existing goals differently than in the 2017 plan. While the rankings were close, the priority of environmental & climate issues shifted slightly to become a higher goal than safety. Other shifts in ranking are illustrated in **Figure 14**.

It is worth noting that when respondents submitted goals in their own words that indicated **multimodal** transportation objectives (transit, bike lanes, trails, sidewalks, etc.) it was the highest percentage outcome. Multimodal as the term on the picklist question scored sixth. While some of this discrepancy is likely attributable to this question’s relative ranking dimension, it also seems that, for many (maybe most) people, the term “multimodal” is not meaningful.

These new rankings were reflected in the *The Way to Go, Whatcom: 2045 Regional / Metropolitan Transportation Plan* and have been shared with regional jurisdictions for consideration in their planning processes.

Figure 14: Comparison of goal rankings from existing to survey results

n=1,195

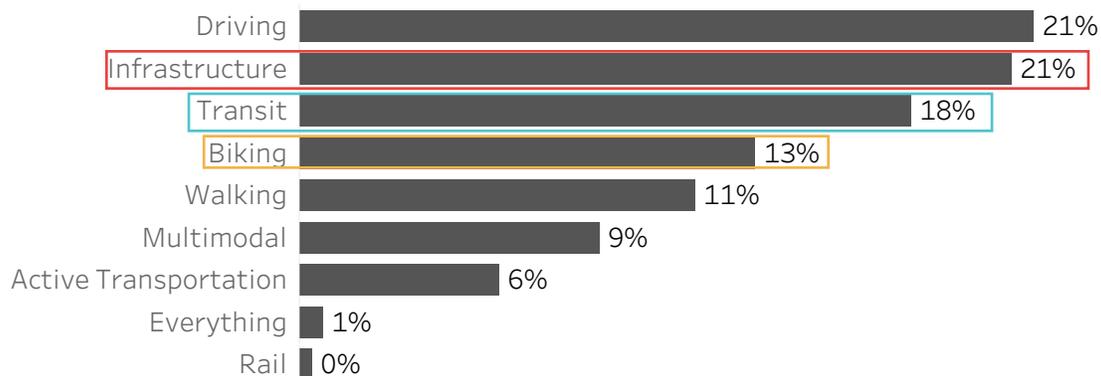


5. Regional transportation successes and challenges

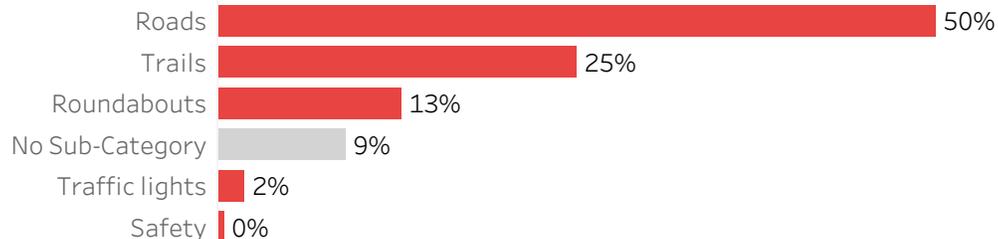
Survey respondents were asked to note what parts of the transportation system currently work well for them. Responses were open-ended and comments categorized by theme (see Figure 15).

Figure 15: Transportation system components that work well

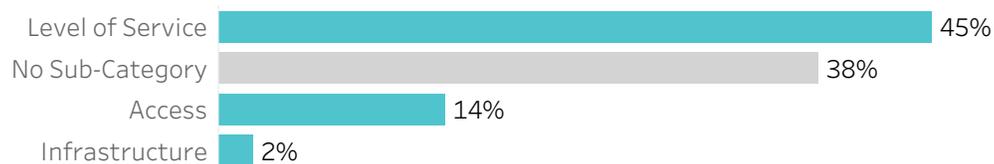
n=1,094



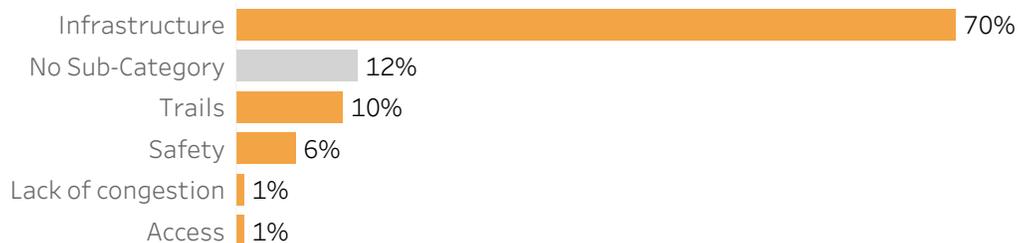
Infrastructure subcategories



Transit subcategories



Biking subcategories



21% of respondents felt the road network for driving worked well. 21% of the responses referred more generally to infrastructure but about one-half of those responses clarified that they were referring to roads and about a quarter specifying trails.

Many felt the transit system as it currently exists works well (18%). Based on subcategories, the most successful component of the transit system is its level of service (45%). This answer is interesting when one looks at the next question, where respondents were asked if there were components of Whatcom’s transportation network that don’t work as well as they would like.

Figure 16 shows answers to the question, “what is a part of the transportation system that doesn’t work as well as you would like?” While 18% of respondents believe transit works well, another 29% think it does not work well. Looking at how answers were sub-categorized, the primary complaint with transit was level of service (40%), typically around hours of operation and schedules.

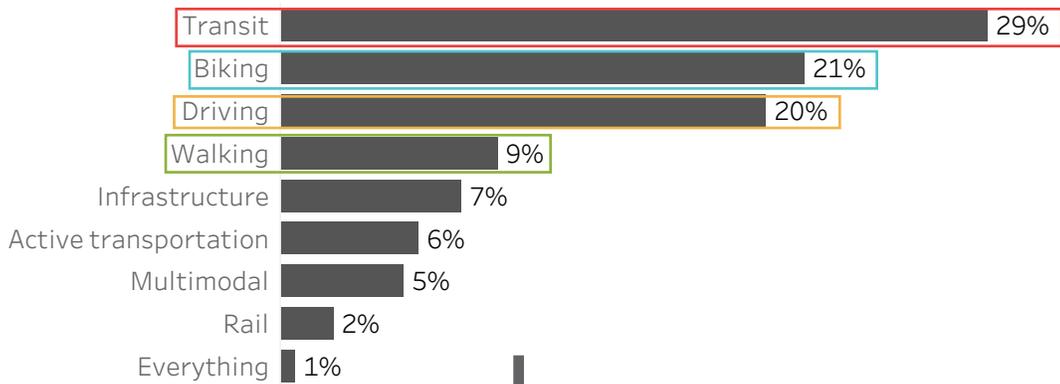
Infrastructure is the primary concern for those who identify walking and biking modes as not working as well as they’d like. Walking and biking also share safety as the second most prevalent concern.

20% of respondents reported driving as having issues, predominantly regarding congestion (57%). 23% of respondents who thought driving had components that didn’t work well expressed infrastructure concerns.

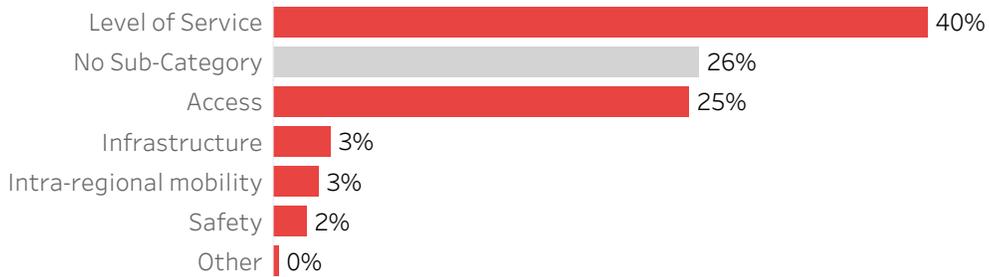


Figure 16: Transportation system components that don't work well

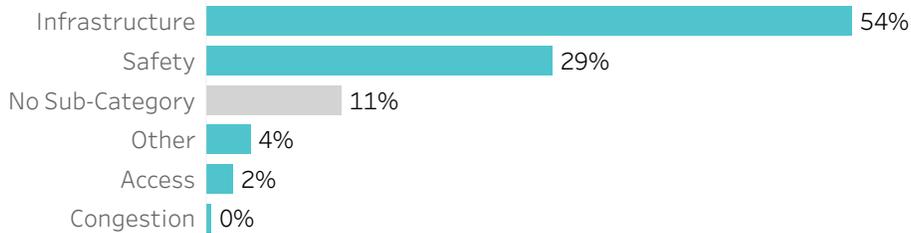
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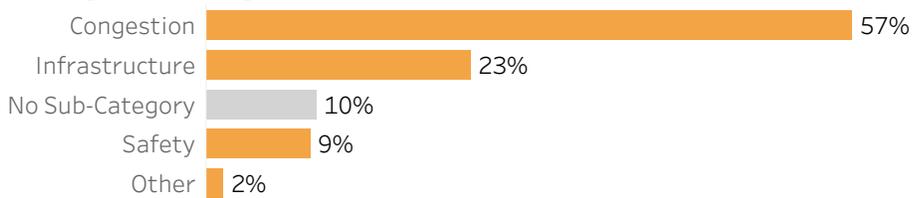
Transit subcategories



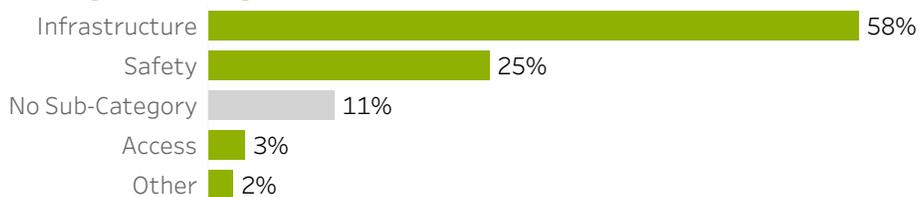
Biking subcategories



Driving subcategories



Walking subcategories



Challenges by location

Respondents were asked to map locations of specific transportation challenges or gaps. **Figure 17** shows where issues were marked for the whole region.

Respondents provided examples of specific challenges in their own words, but responses were also categorized by the type of transportation challenge. **Figure 18** shows the seven categories provided to respondents and what percentage of total challenges for each jurisdiction were identified in each category. Across almost all jurisdictions, congestions was listed as a top challenge. Of note is how much respondents in Lynden, and in areas outside of the City of Bellingham, note bus service as a concern. Safety issues are identified in all jurisdictions except for Everson and Sumas. More detailed results from each response has been availed to each jurisdiction for their consideration.

Figure 17: Transportation challenges and gaps by location

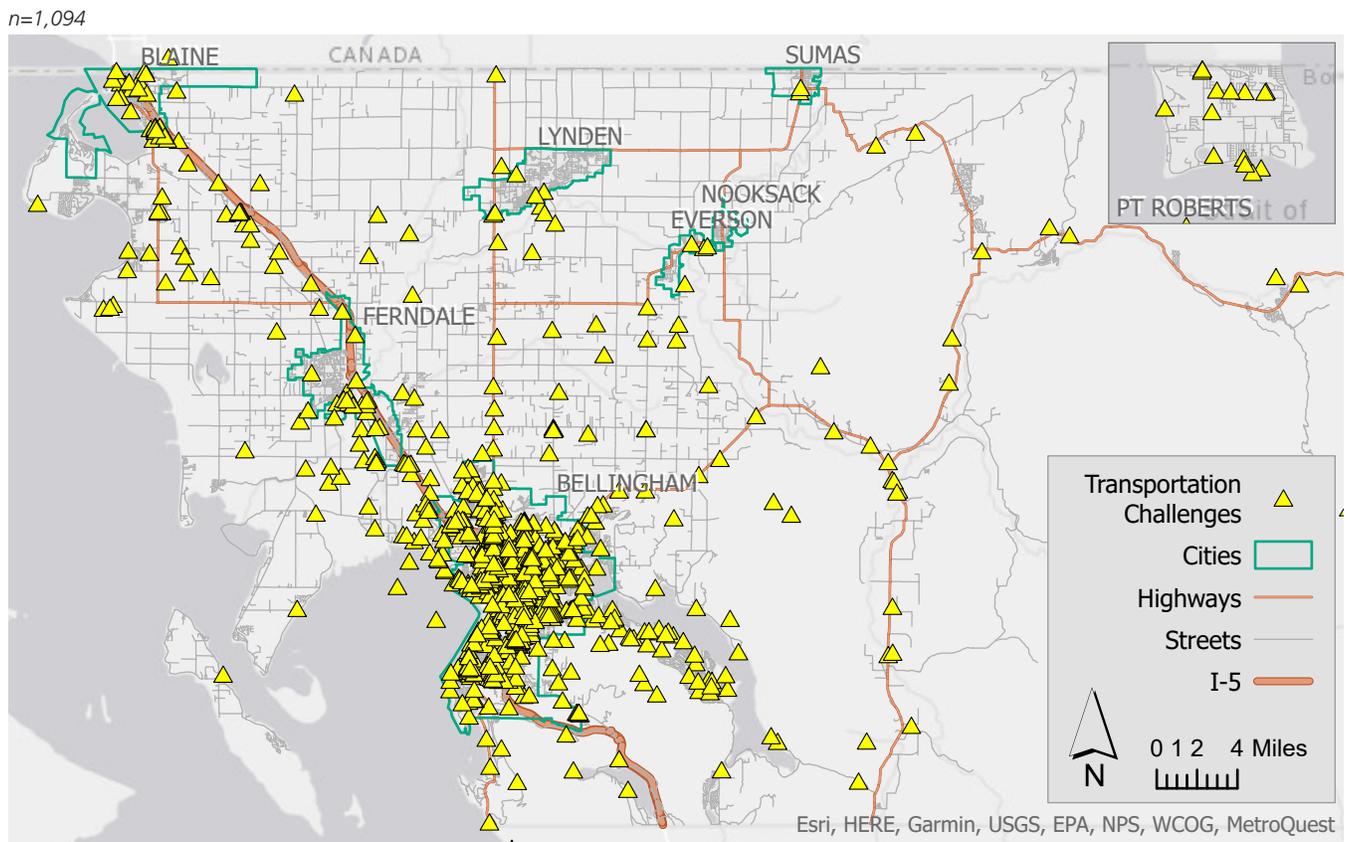


Figure 18: Transportation challenges by type and jurisdiction

n=534

Challenge	Whatcom							Region Total	Non-B'ham Total
	Bellingham	County	Blaine	Everson	Ferndale	Lynden	Sumas		
Congestion	34%	22%	39%		56%			32%	26%
Safety	27%	18%	22%		17%	25%		24%	18%
Walking/bike access	19%	17%	0%		6%	0%	100%	18%	15%
Bus service	9%	24%	17%	50%	6%	50%		13%	22%
Infrastructure condition	10%	15%	17%	50%	17%	0%		11%	15%
Environmental impact	1%	3%	0%		0%	25%		2%	3%
Freight access	0%	1%	4%		0%			1%	1%

6. Impacts of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted almost every aspect of life globally. From a transportation perspective, the 2020 lock-downs, extended school and work-from-home mandates, closures of restaurants, retail, and public facilities, and changes in employment all contributed to a completely new situation for all types of travel.

Respondents were asked about changes in their households' travel behavior resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and given a list of responses they could indicate applied. Responses are shown in **Figure 19**. Deliveries were the biggest change reported. Alongside increased curbside services, respondents reported increased biking and walking. More interestingly, increased biking and walking are the travel change respondents indicated they would be most likely to continue after the pandemic is over (see **Figure 20**).

Other changes respondents felt would sustain include increased use of deliveries, working from home, and a decreased use of transit.

Figure 19: Household changes during COVID-19 pandemic

n=1,188

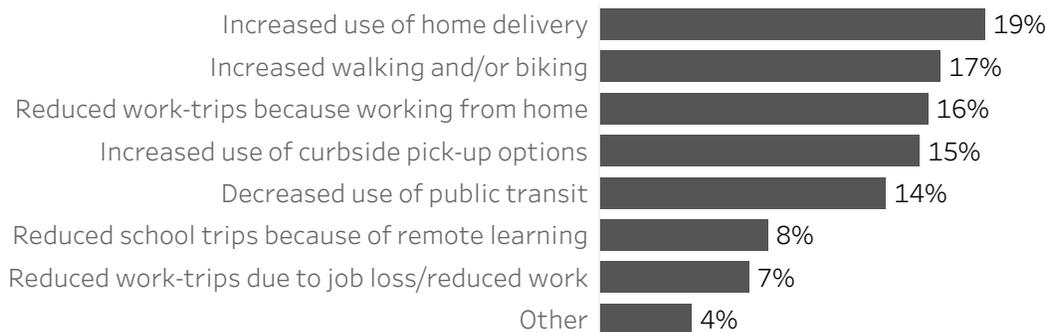
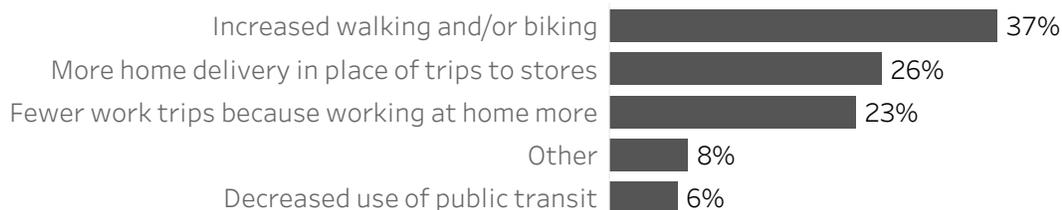


Figure 20: COVID-19 travel changes that likely to continue after pandemic

n=1,006



7. Conclusions

Data from the 2021 Whatcom Public Engagement Survey has been used to update the Whatcom Regional and Metropolitan Transportation Plans, combined together into *The Way to Go, Whatcom: 2045 Regional / Metropolitan Transportation Plan*. Although some demographic groups were more represented than others (older age groups, based in Bellingham), the majority of respondents closely represented the population of the Whatcom region as a whole.

Insights from the survey have allowed for a clearer picture of what residents value in terms of priorities for investments and strategies, especially relating to transportation.

Overall investment priorities

Participants were asked to rank their priorities for investments of public funding (not limited to transportation). Results provide insight into the values regional residents hold dear:

1. Environment
2. Health
3. Transportation
4. Recreation & parks
5. Schools
6. Managing land use
7. Safety & emergency response
8. Economic development
9. Judicial/legal

Transportation investment priorities

Participants were specifically asked about where they'd like to see transportation funding go:

1. Environment improvements
2. Access
3. Mobility
4. Safety
5. Infrastructure improvements
6. Congestion relief
7. Improved & increased transit
8. Equity
9. Multimodal solutions
10. Focus on less cars
11. Community-building
12. Cost-effective spending
13. Better land use

New rankings

Results from the survey provided robust and current community feedback to the Whatcom Transportation Policy Board (WTPB). With this information, the WTBP was able to consider, discuss, and find consensus on changes to definitions and priorities of the Whatcom regions transportation system goals for the next 20 years. The updated goals are as follows. This prioritized list will provide context for planning and programming decisions.

1. Environment & climate
2. Safety
3. Access
4. Mobility
5. Economic vitality
6. Preservation
7. Multi-modal system
8. Freight transportation

Strategies

Respondents offered ideas on how elected officials could best advance transportation goals. By far the priority strategy was policy change, followed by allocation increases. The top five strategies included:

1. Infrastructure improvements, specifically for bicycle, car, and active transportation modes
2. Access, especially improved transit access, as well as more multimodal services
3. Transit, with a focus on rural transit
4. Environment, primarily through increased transit
5. Safety for active transportation modes, transit, and cars

Impacts of COVID-19

Because the survey was conducted at the height of the COVID-19 global pandemic, changes in household travel patterns due to the impacts of the pandemic were taken into consideration. Changes residents made to their travel behavior included

1. Increased use of home delivery
2. Increased walking and/or biking
3. Reduced work trips because of working from home
4. Increased use of curbside pick-up options
5. Decreased use of public transit
6. Reduced school trips because of remote learning
7. Reduced work trips due to job loss or reduced working hours

Of those changes, respondents said they planned to continue walking and biking more, use home delivery in place of trips to the store, and make fewer trips to work because of working from home, even after the end of the pandemic.

Findings for jurisdictions

Responses to the survey have been summarized for the region as a whole in this report. However data may also be filtered by jurisdiction and age group using the survey's dynamic dashboard tools online at: wcog.org/2021-public-engagement-survey/. More detailed breakdowns of the data are also available to regional jurisdictions in a multitude of formats. Contact Hugh Conroy, Director of Planning, at hugh@wcog.org for more information.