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LABarometer

Top 5 Takeaways *from* The Mobility Survey

WAVE 2

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The USC Dornsife-Union Bank LABarometer Mobility survey examines residents' transportation behaviors, experiences, and attitudes, especially as they relate to county-wide efforts to reduce automobile congestion and increase the use of alternative transportation modes. The survey covers a number of topics, including personal car ownership and car use, public perceptions of public transit and ride-hailing, and the social conditions and attitudes that facilitate the use of alternatives to the personal car.

In Wave 1 of the survey – fielded from December 11, 2019, to February 7, 2020 – we asked residents to report on their transportation behaviors and experiences over the previous 12 months, long before the coronavirus arrived in the United States. Wave 2, on the other hand, was fielded from March 2, 2021, to April 30, 2021, in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic. The survey asks a sample of 1,281 residents to report on their transportation behaviors and experiences during a year marked by lockdowns, business closures, and soaring infection rates that placed severe limits on the ability and willingness of residents to move around the County.

With Wave 1 as our reference point, Wave 2 offers valuable insight into the impact the pandemic has had on patterns of mobility in L.A. Notably, our results indicate that public transit and ride-hailing were the two transportation modes hardest hit by the pandemic. Angelenos were 66% less likely to use public transit in 2020 than they were in 2019 and 56% less likely to use ride-hailing services.

Declines in public transit and ride-hailing use were particularly striking among high-income Angelenos. The bus and Metro, for example, lost 62% of their low-income users and 90% of their high-income users. Likewise, our survey shows that, as of March 2021, 70-80% of L.A. County residents felt somewhat to very unsafe from COVID-19 infection on the bus, Metro, or in a ride-hailing vehicle.

Accordingly, we find that the personal car remains the dominant mode of transportation in L.A. County, and its popularity has only grown since 2019. Approximately, 58% of Angelenos relied *solely* on a private vehicle in the last year, an increase from the 34% of Angelenos who relied solely on a private vehicle in 2019. Moreover, our data reveal that the personal car is now perceived by more Angelenos to be an enjoyable and convenient mode of transportation than it was before the pandemic.

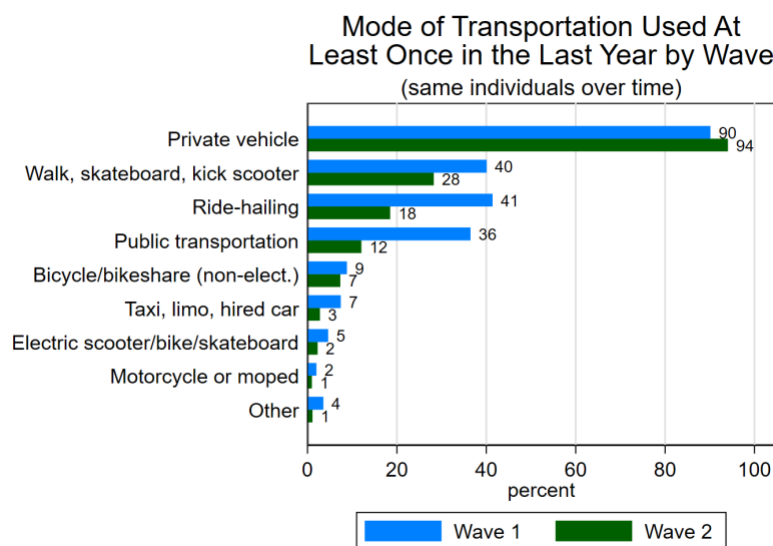
To summarize, in 2020, L.A. County took several steps backwards in its effort to decrease reliance on the automobile and increase reliance on alternative modes of transportation. Every transportation mode suffered decline in use during the pandemic, but alternatives to the personal car were particularly hard hit and emerged from 2020 mired in a public perception problem even bigger than before.

On the next page, you will find the top five takeaways from Wave 2 of the LABarometer Mobility survey. To learn more about our Mobility survey and other LABarometer surveys, please visit <https://cesr.usc.edu/labarometer/overview>.

TOP 5 TAKEAWAYS

1. Use of public transit and ride-hailing services declined by almost two-thirds in 2020.

According to the results of our latest Mobility Survey, L.A. County residents were 66% less likely to use public transit and 56% less likely to use ride-hailing services in 2020 than they were in 2019. More specifically, we find that the prevalence of occasional to frequent ride-hailing use dropped from 41% in Wave 1 of the survey to 18% in Wave 2. The prevalence of occasional to frequent public transit use dropped from 36% in Wave 1 to 12% in Wave 2.

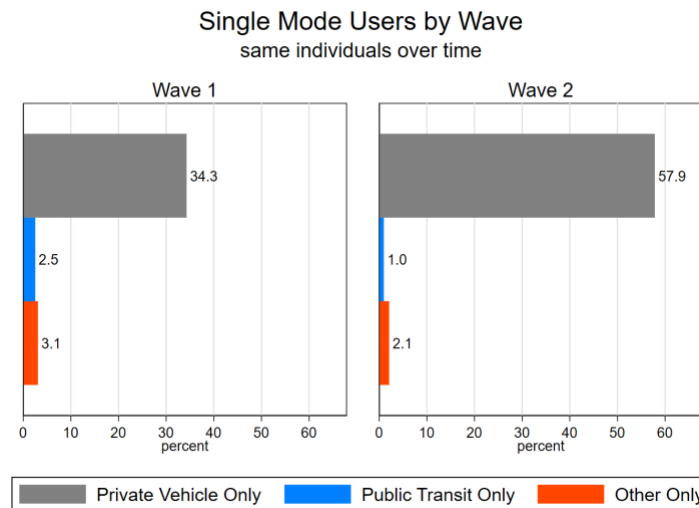


Upon further analysis, we find that the 24 percentage-point drop in public transit use between 2019 and 2020 occurred primarily among residents with a high income and among residents living in the City of L.A., rather than in other parts of L.A. County. Our data also reveal that the 23 percentage-point drop in ride-hailing use occurred primarily among white residents, young or middle-aged residents, and those with a high income or a high level of education.

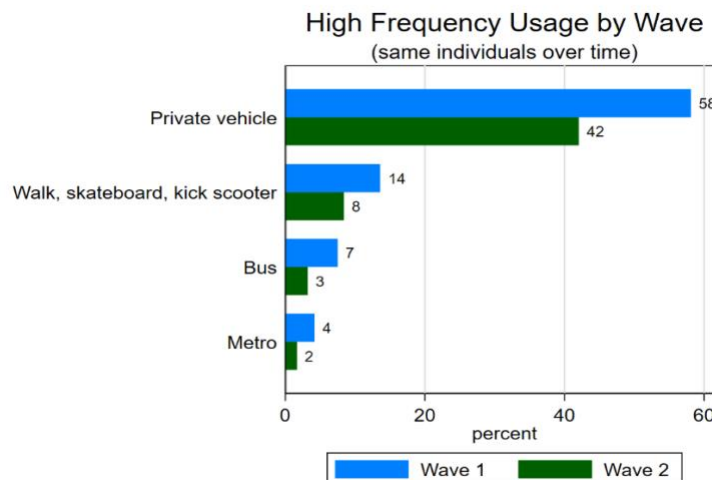
About the analysis: To estimate change over time in transportation use, Waves 1 and 2 asked residents: “Over the last year, what modes of transportation did you use to go to places (like work, the grocery store, daycare, medical appointments, restaurants, parks, the airport, etc.) in or around Los Angeles County? Please check all that apply.” Response options included: private vehicle, ride-hailing service, taxi/limo/hired car service, public transportation (bus, light rail, etc.), walk/skateboard/kick scooter, bicycle or bikeshare, electric scooter/bike/skateboard, motorcycle or moped, other. The majority of respondents completed each survey within the first two weeks of fielding. Thus, in Wave 1, “the last year” roughly refers to the period of December 2018-December 2019. In Wave 2, “the last year” roughly refers to the period of March 2020-March 2021.

2. The prevalence of personal car use increased in 2020, although frequency of personal car use declined.

The personal car remains the dominant mode of transportation in L.A. County and its popularity has only grown over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. While 90% of Angelenos reported using a private vehicle in 2019, that share increased to 94% in 2020. According to their self-reports, approximately 58% of residents relied *solely* on a private vehicle in the last year (meaning they did not report using any other form of transportation), which is a 24 percentage-point drop from the 34% of residents who relied solely on a private vehicle in 2019.



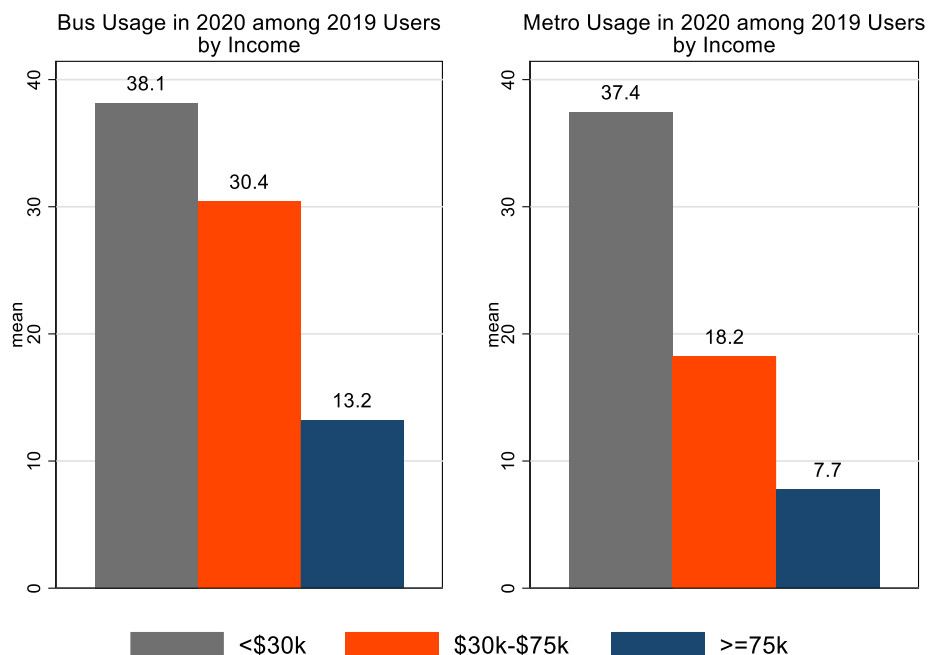
While the prevalence of personal car use grew in 2020, frequency of personal car use declined. According to residents' self-reports, high-frequency use – defined as use every day or most days per week – of the private vehicle fell substantially between Waves 1 and 2 of the survey, likely due to shelter-in-place orders and business closures. In Wave 1, 67% of private vehicle users reported using a private vehicle every day or most days per week. In Wave 2, this statistic decreased to 45% of private vehicle users.



3. Public transit lost 90% of its high-income users and 62% of its low-income users in 2020.

As Angelenos grew increasingly reliant on the personal car, our data indicate that public transit lost almost all of its high-income users and the majority of its low-income users in 2020. Public bus and Metro use declined substantially across income groups but to a greater degree among high-income residents compared to low-income residents.

According to our data, residents who used the bus in 2019 were 87 percentage points less likely to use the bus in 2020 if they were high-income, 62 percentage points less likely to use it if they were low-income. Likewise, residents who used the Metro in 2019 were 92 percentage points less likely to use the Metro in 2020 if they were high-income, 63 percentage points less likely to use it if they were low-income.



This income differential in public transit use left the bus and Metro with a majority low-income ridership in 2020. In the first wave of our survey, low-income residents comprised 45% of self-reported bus users and 36% of self-reported Metro users in 2019. By the second wave, low-income residents comprised 58% of self-reported bus users and 59% of self-reported Metro users.

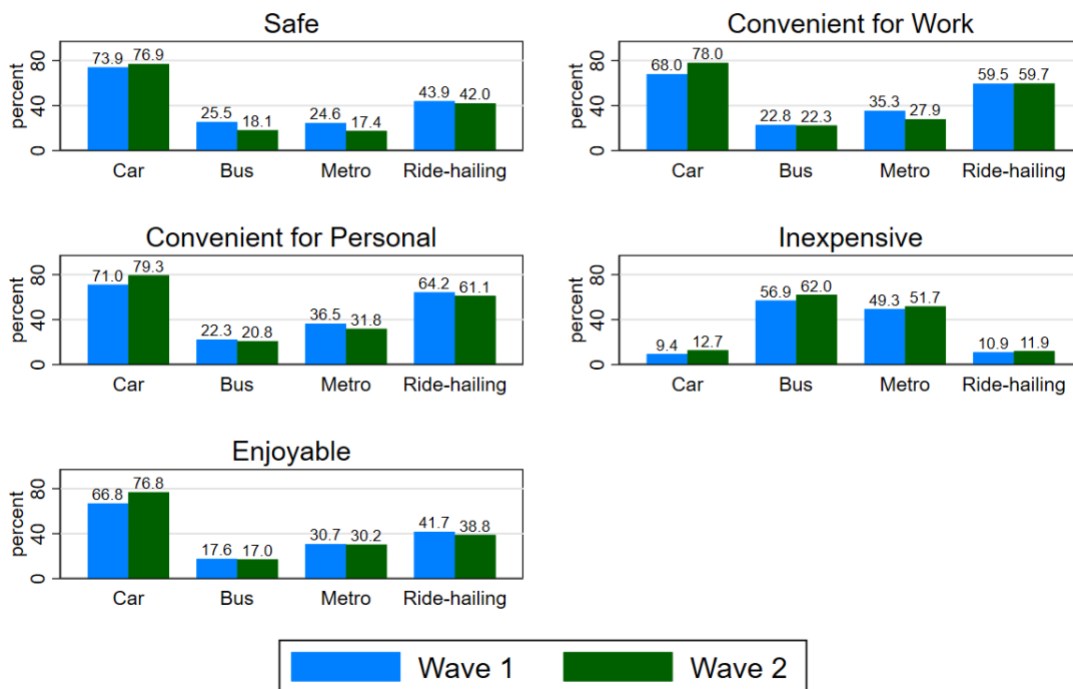
About the analysis: To track change over time in bus and Metro use, each wave of our Mobility survey asks residents about the forms of public transportation they used in the last year. Response options included bus, Metro light rail/subway, Metrolink train, Amtrak train, Dial-a-Ride (paratransit), other. After restricting our analytic sample to residents who, in the first wave of the survey, reported using the public bus or Metro light rail, we calculated the percent who also reported using the public bus or Metro light rail in the second wave of the survey. We then analyzed differences in bus and Metro use across household income categories.

4. In 2020, the bus and Metro lost favorability among Angelenos, while the personal car gained favorability.

In both the first and second waves of the Mobility survey, we asked residents to rate, on a 1-to-7 scale (where 1 reflects a strong unfavorable assessment and 7 reflects a strong favorable assessment), the personal car, bus, Metro light-rail, and ride-hailing on a number of dimensions, including safety, convenience for work or school related trips, convenience for personal or leisure trips, cost, and enjoyment.

According to our results, the personal car is more widely perceived as an enjoyable and convenient mode of transportation today than it was prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Between Waves 1 and 2 of our survey, the share of residents rating the personal car as somewhat to very enjoyable, convenient for work or school related trips, or convenient for personal or leisure trips increased by 10-15%.

Percent Favorable Assessment of Mode Characteristics Over Time
same individuals over time



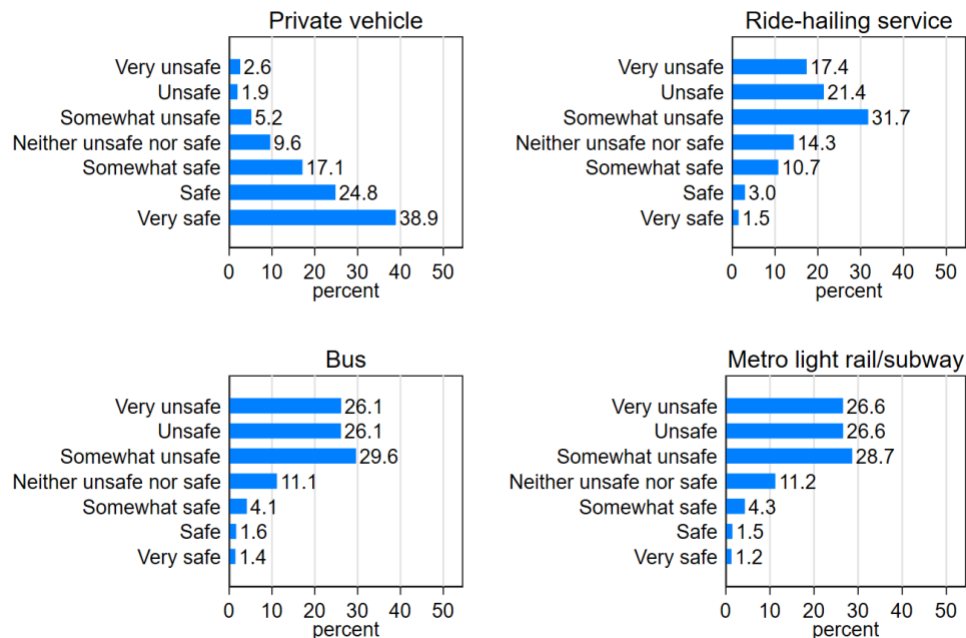
Meanwhile, perceptions of the bus and especially Metro declined in favorability. Between Waves 1 and 2, the share of residents rating the bus and Metro as somewhat to very safe from crime decreased by seven percentage points. Additionally, the share of residents rating the Metro and bus as somewhat to very convenient for personal/leisure trips or work/school trips decreased by approximately three and five percentage points respectively.

5. In March 2021, 70-80% of Angelenos felt they were *not* safe from COVID-19 on the bus, Metro, or in a ride-hailing vehicle.

To better understand how L.A. County residents feel about using different transportation modes within the context of a pandemic, Wave 2 of our survey asked residents to rate how safe they perceive themselves to be from contracting COVID-19 while using a private vehicle, a ride-hailing service, Metro light rail, and the public bus.

According to our results, in March 2021, 82% of Angelenos felt that they would be somewhat to very unsafe from COVID-19 on a Metro train or public bus and 71% felt they would be somewhat to very unsafe from COVID-19 while using a ride-hailing service.

How Safe Are You From Contracting COVID-19?



For perspective, in March 2021, we also asked L.A. residents (through the [Understanding Coronavirus in America](#) survey) to rate their safety from COVID-19 while doing other types of activities, like going to the grocery store or dining-in at a restaurant. We found that about 68% of L.A. County residents felt unsafe from COVID-19 while dining-in at a restaurant and 44% felt unsafe from COVID-19 at a grocery store. By June 2021, however, those statistics had decreased to 55% and 49%, respectively.

Altogether, these results suggest that public transit has a sizable public perception problem when it comes to COVID-related safety, but this perception problem is likely to diminish over time, albeit slowly.

ABOUT US

USC Dornsife LABarometer

LABarometer is a quarterly, internet-based survey of approximately 1,713 randomly selected Los Angeles County residents, designed and administered by the *Dornsife Center for Economic and Social Research* at the University of Southern California. The survey monitors social conditions in Los Angeles, with a focus on four key issues: livability, mobility, sustainability & resiliency, and affordability & prosperity. By following the same residents over time, LABarometer aims to capture trends and shifts in residents' attitudes and circumstances, allowing decisionmakers in the public and private sectors to better understand the evolving lives and needs of L.A. residents. LABarometer is made possible by the financial support of Union Bank.

About the Mobility Survey

The LABarometer Mobility survey assesses residents' transportation patterns, experiences, and preferences, especially as they relate to county-wide efforts to reduce automobile congestion and increase the use of alternative transportation modes. Wave 2 of the survey covers the following topics: transportation mode use (frequency, purpose), personal car ownership, public perceptions of public and private transportation modes, access to public transit, public sentiment around electric scooters, traffic safety, COVID-related, travel-related experiences of harassment and assault, and activities missed due to transportation issues.

Data and Methods

A total of 1,281 Los Angeles County residents participated in the Mobility Survey from March 2, 2021, through April 30, 2021. Participants were recruited from LABarometer's survey panel of 1,713 adults living in randomly selected households throughout Los Angeles County. The participation rate for the survey was 75%. The margin of sampling error[†] is 2.7 percentage points.

The survey was conducted in respondents' choice of English or Spanish. To participate in a survey, respondents could use any computer, cell phone, or tablet with Internet access. Internet-connected tablets were provided to respondents without internet access.

[†]Sampling error is calculated at the 95% confidence level, using a sample proportion of 0.5 to generate an upper bound of uncertainty. Please note that factors other than sampling error, including question wording, question order, sample type, survey method, and population coverage, may affect the results of any survey.

For More Information

For a complete description of our data, methods, and findings, please visit our website at <https://cesr.usc.edu/labarometer/overview>. For more information, contact us at labarometer-l@usc.edu.