

The car is king in L.A. County—despite growing public transit options

February 20 2020, by Lance Igon



Uber and other ride-hailing services are second most popular form of transportation, but used infrequently

MODES OF TRANSIT USED IN LAST YEAR

Personal vehicle



Ride-hailing



Walk, skateboard, kick scooter



Public transportation



Bicycle/bikeshare (non-electric)



Taxi, limo, hired car



Electric scooter/bike/skateboard



Other



Motorcycle, moped



Frequency of ride-hailing use

<i>Every day</i>	<1%
<i>Most days per week</i>	4%
<i>A few days per week</i>	10%
<i>1 day per week</i>	11%
<i>Less than 1 day per week</i>	74%

Q: 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.

Despite Los Angeles County's legendary traffic jams, residents remain wedded to their cars and reluctant to use public transportation due to concerns over safety and convenience, according to the new USC Dornsife/Union Bank LABarometer mobility survey. But in identifying specific concerns, the survey, which was conducted by the USC Dornsife Center for Economic and Social Research (CESR), also pointed to potential solutions for increasing use of public transportation.

Private vehicles are used at more than twice the rate of the second-most popular transportation mode, ride-hailing services such as Lyft and Uber.

LABarometer respondents love their cars in part because they feel safer from crime. However, car users are more vulnerable to accidents: 15% of residents were involved in an accident last year, most commonly while driving, according to LABarometer.

"It's fascinating that people believe they are safer in cars than in [public transit](#). That's simply false," said Wendy Wood, Provost Professor of Psychology and Business at USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences. "There are 40,000 deaths per year on the highways, but only a fraction of that number of deaths on [mass transit](#). We all feel safe and comfortable with what we know—in this case, driving." Wood is also a member of the Board of Directors of the Los Angeles Metro's Office of Extraordinary Innovation.

Survey respondents considered personal vehicles the most convenient and enjoyable way to get around.

"This survey underscores how important the full customer service

experience is, in [transit](#) and other modes," said Marlon Boarnet, chair of the Department of Urban Planning and Spatial Analysis at the USC Sol Price School of Public Policy. "Safety and convenience are key factors that are limiting the alternatives to the car, but Los Angeles can become a city where everyone has viable alternatives to driving. The data in this study help highlight the challenges and opportunities, and help point the way forward."

Worries over safety and convenience play a role

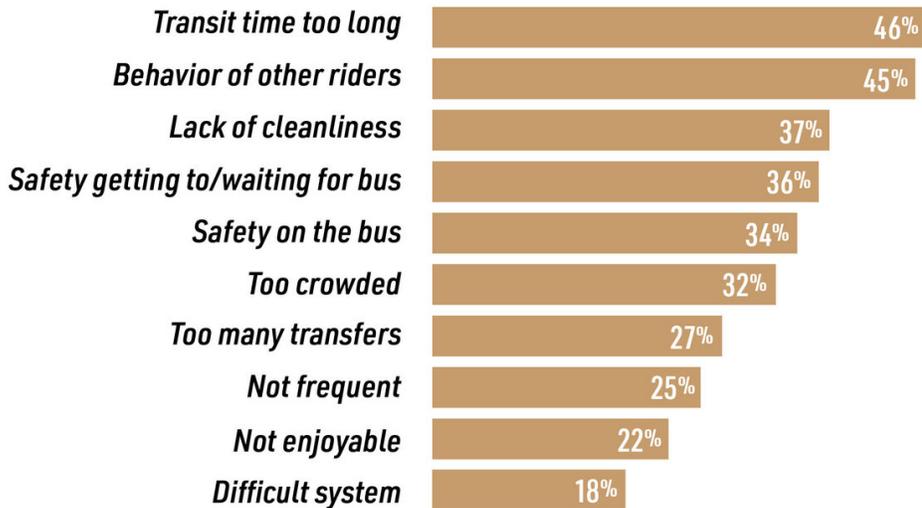
LABarometer respondents cited a variety of concerns about public transportation.

In general, residents felt slightly more secure on buses than on Metro trains. The behavior of other riders was the second-biggest concern for those who use Metro rail and the bus. The top concern for bus riders? Long transit times. The top concern for train riders was a lack of nearby stops.

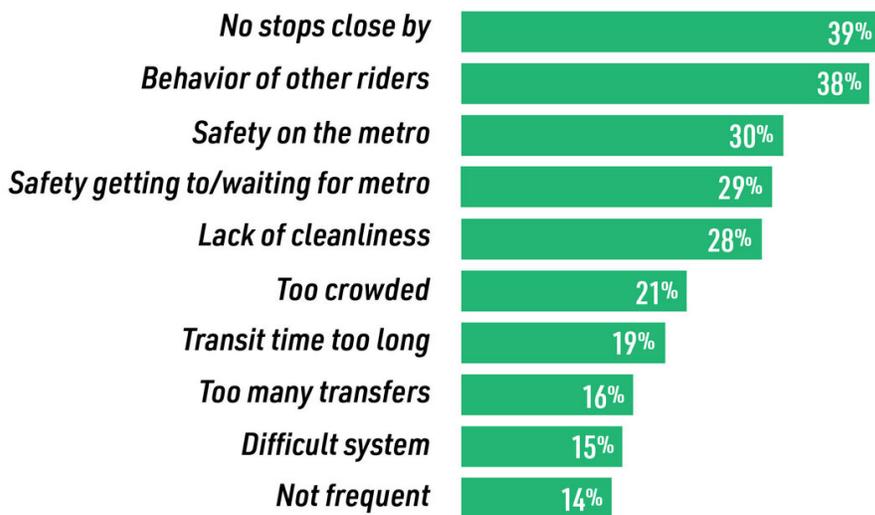
A top concern for public transit users: the behavior of other riders



TOP 10 CONCERNS WITH BUS



TOP 10 CONCERNS WITH METRO



Q: What are your biggest concerns or issues with using the (bus)(Metro light rail/subway) system in Los Angeles County? You may check up to five.

Cleanliness, convenience-related issues and safety getting to or waiting at stops were top-10 concerns for each system.

In L.A., transit times are a problem for drivers and public transit users alike. Between 30% and 40% of residents missed an activity last year because transit times were too long or they couldn't afford transportation. Nearly half said they missed social or leisure activities, at least occasionally, and more than a quarter were forced to skip personal or family medical care visits because transit times were too long.

Competition from ride-hailing does not appear to be the problem for public transit, as respondents who ride-hail are more likely to use public transit than those who do not. The most frequent users of public transit—lower-income residents—are also the most frequent users of ride-hailing services.

Researchers look for clues to increase public transit ridership

To dig deeper and identify potential solutions, LABarometer researchers analyzed the individual circumstances and attitudes associated with increased public transit among residents.

"Our findings suggest that safety improvements could get more people on the Metro," said Kyla Thomas, director of the LABarometer and a sociologist with CESR. "But improving convenience for daily activities

is likely to get people to use the Metro more frequently, as a real substitute for the car."

Conversely, there may be tipping points that persuade drivers to make greater use of public transportation.

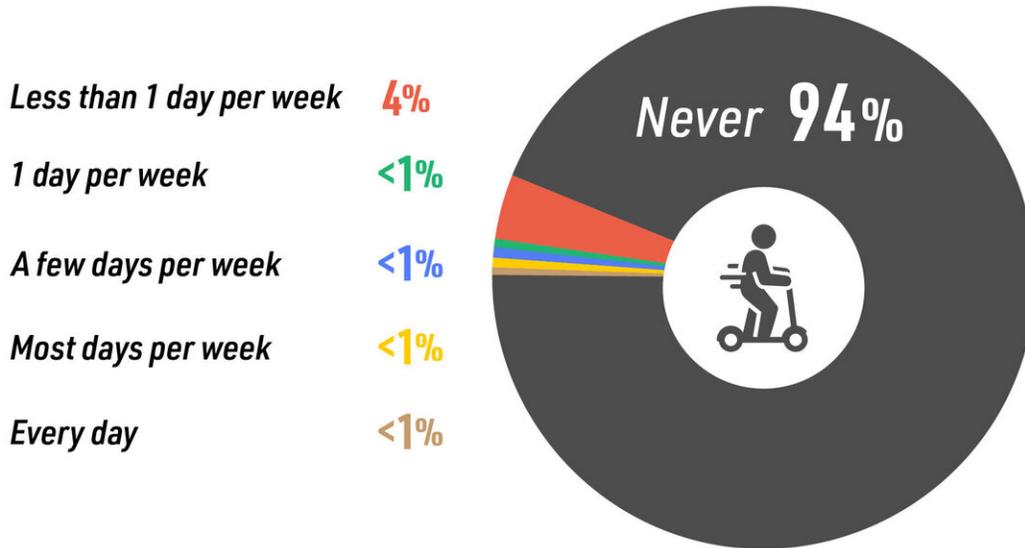
"The habit of driving persists even when traffic becomes the nightmare that it is in L.A. today," Wood said. "But motorists will change their habits and use more public transportation if you add some friction to driving, such as making parking more expensive or simply unavailable."

For those who use public transit, walking is by far the most popular way to get to a bus or Metro rail station. Yet, the LABarometer shows that more travel-related incidents of harassment and assault are happening on our sidewalks than anywhere else, and to women more so than men. More than 15% of women and 5% of men experienced some form of sexual harassment last year while traveling. Three quarters of those who experienced sexual harassment or assault reported that they were walking at the time of the incident.

Perhaps not surprisingly, residents who use e-scooters or e-bikes are more likely to use Metro rail. But despite the amount of media attention devoted to these newly arrived modes of transportation, 94% of residents said they'd never used them. Fewer than 2% of people said they used them at least once a week.



E-scooters: fewer than 1 in 15 Angelenos have ever used one



Q: In a typical month this past year, about how many days did you use an electric scooter, electric bike, or electric skateboard to go to places in or around Los Angeles County?

About the current survey

The mobility survey, conducted from Dec. 11, 2019, to Feb. 7, 2020, asked 1,400 L.A. County residents a series of questions about their transportation behaviors, experiences and attitudes to better understand how Angelenos travel around L.A. County and why they make the

transportation decisions they do. During the initial phases of survey design, the survey team consulted with transportation agencies, mobility companies and nonprofit organizations to better understand key data gaps. No financial consideration was provided to the consulting entities.

About USC Dornsife/Union Bank LABarometer

LABarometer is made possible by the generous support of Union Bank through a sponsorship agreement. The agreement is funded for 10 years, with plans to expand survey participation in L.A County over the next few years to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the region.

LABarometer is a quarterly, internet-based survey of L.A. County residents, designed and administered by CESR. The survey monitors social conditions and attitudes in L.A., with a focus on four key issues: livability; mobility; sustainability and resilience; and affordability and prosperity.

By following the same residents over time, LABarometer aims to capture trends and shifts in residents' attitudes and circumstances, allowing decision-makers in the public and private sectors to better understand the evolving lives and needs of L.A. residents.

LABarometer is a resource for everyone. Anyone—residents, researchers, businesses, policymakers, and nonprofits—can access quarterly reports and data through this website and use the results to make informed decisions about how to improve the quality of life in L.A.

Provided by University of Southern California

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