Presented to:



2024 NORTHWEST ARKANSAS REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION SURVEY

Findings Report

First Wave – September 2019 Second Wave – August 2024

September 2024

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Study Objectives

Background

In September 2019, ETC Institute administered a Regional Transportation Survey for the Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission. In August 2024, Ariel administered a second wave of this survey.

The purpose of the surveys is to gather input from residents to better understand the level of satisfaction with the region's transportation system and attitudes toward prioritizing transportation improvements.

Key Questionnaire Topics Include

- Perceptions of travel in the Northwest Arkansas (NWA) region
- Current and emerging transportation problems
- Long range transportation planning issues
- Non-auto transportation
- Funding issues
- Regional transportation investment priorities
- Employment and school related travel
- Public transit use





Methodology

A combination of mail surveys and online interviews were conducted in September 2019 and in August 2024 with Northwest Arkansas residents.

Participants

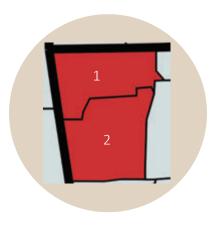


<u>First Wave - Total Respondents (n=834)</u> <u>Second Wave - Total Respondents (n=420)</u> Northwest Arkansas

Participant Qualifications



<u>Qualifications</u> Arkansas resident



Northwest Arkansas Counties

• 1 Benton

• 2 Washington





Key Finding One: Traffic has increased but residents are finding it easier to travel, except for non-auto travel.

- Similar to 2019, almost 9 in 10 say traffic congestion has increased in the past five years
- NWA transportation system is higher rated in 2024 10% Excellent in 2024 vs 2% in 2019
- Rush hour congestion is higher rated in 2024 28% Better than other cities in 2024 vs 16% in 2019
- Satisfaction increased for ease of travel between home and the five big cities (especially Bentonville [+12%] and Rogers [+10%]) and for ease of travel by car on major city streets (+10%) and all six are now lower ranked priorities in 2024
- Satisfaction with non-auto infrastructure improved but satisfaction with ease of travel decreased for biking and walking while public transportation is still among the lowest ranked of the 25 attributes for satisfaction
 - Dedicated bicycle infrastructure (+24%, rank 3)
 vs Ease of travel by bicycle (-2%, rank 9)
 - Availability of pedestrian walkways (+10%, rank 11) vs Ease of travel by walking (-5%, rank 20)
 - Availability of public transportation (+20%, rank 23) vs Ease of travel by public transportation (+18%, rank 24)

Key Finding Two: Transportation priorities are similar to 2019 – 9 of the 10 are the same in 2024.

- Still among top 10 priorities are traffic during peak times, traffic signal operations, ease of travel by public transportation, traffic safety on major streets, neighborhood speeding traffic and ease of travel by car on major city streets
- Condition of roadways and availability of parking were in the top 10 in 2019 and are even higher priorities in 2024
- Perhaps reflecting their higher satisfaction, public transportation went from priority #2 in 2019 to priority #4 in 2024

Implication: Satisfaction with the transportation system has increased but non-auto travel is still a challenge.



Key Finding Three: Most transportation issues remain problematic in the Northwest Arkansas region, but non-auto travel is now perceived as being a much bigger problem.

- The top two issues are better but are still seen as problematic
 - Roads keeping up with development (-7%)
 - Bentonville congestion (-12%)
- Most issues problematic in 2019 are similarly rated in 2024
 - Big city congestion Rogers, Fayetteville, Springdale and Lowell
 - Lack of public transportation
 - Large truck traffic
- Although still among the least problematic of the issues, non-auto travel is a decidedly bigger problem in 2024
 - Lack of safe pedestrian facilities (+17%)
 - Lack of safe bicycle trails/facilities (+17%)
- Other issues low ranked but seen as more problematic in 2024 are air quality (+7%) and train traffic (+6%)

Implication: Congestion remains a persistent problem, and the lack of non-auto infrastructure is growing more problematic.





Key Finding Four: Satisfaction with and the importance of long-range planning is consistent with 2019.

- Satisfaction was similarly rated (+/- 6%) in 2024 for 12 of the 14 planning issues
- Satisfaction increased for improving travel safety (+9%) and reducing urban sprawl (+8%)
- The most important long range planning issues remained the same in 2024
 - Relieving traffic congestion (-9%)
 - Maintaining existing infrastructure (+7%)
- The importance of other long-range planning issues (+/- 7%) is similar to 2019
- Protecting the natural landscapes (+12%) is the only issue that changed by double-digits in 2024

Implication: Congestion and infrastructure continue to be priorities for residents.





Key Finding Five: Satisfaction with and the importance of public transportation increased in 2024 but lags behind other travel areas.

- Satisfaction with public transportation increased for all options surveyed, particularly for ...
 - Carpooling service (+17%, rank 5), Distance to bus stop (+13%, rank 10), number of destinations (+12%, rank 12)
- Air travel was slightly less important in 2024 while public transportation increased in importance
 - Affordability of flights (-15%, rank 1), Adequate XNA flight routes (-8%, rank 5)
 - Transit services on the weekend (+14%, rank 6), Days/Times of bus service (+12%, rank 9), Speed of travel by bus (+9%, rank 13)
- Poor accessibility and inconvenient routes/times are the biggest infrastructure impediments to public transit usage
- Of the three topics surveyed in 2024, satisfaction was lowest for non-auto transportation
 - Travel in NWA average satisfaction 43% across 25 attributes
 - Long range planning average satisfaction 35% across 14 attributes
 - Non-auto transportation average satisfaction 28% across 16 attributes

Implication: Public transportation satisfaction is higher but is still lower rated than travel and planning. Convenience is a big priority for public transportation. Residents need accessible bus stops with convenient routes.



Key Finding Six: Residents increased their support for funding public transportation and roads/highways but are more neutral when it comes to passenger rail.

- Funding should be much greater for public transportation (+12%)
- Funding should be much greater for road and highway improvements (+9%)
- Neither favor nor oppose developing regional passenger rail (+8%)

Key Finding Seven: When looking at priorities, importance and funding, there's more support for public transportation, including biking/walking infrastructure.

- Four of the top five improvements in terms of priority and importance remained the same in 2024 ...
 - Improving services for seniors/disabled Using IT for safety and better flow More bus routes, hours and services Building, improving existing sidewalks
- When asked to allocate \$100 in funding for various projects, streets received the <u>highest</u> funding allocation but bus and bike/walking facilities received <u>higher</u> allocations in 2024
 - Maintaining streets/highways and building new streets/highways is still tops but lower \$49 in 2019 vs \$44 in 2024
 - Improving bus service (+\$3) and bike/walking facilities (+\$3)
 - Passenger rail allocation remained unchanged at \$17 while airport allocation declined from \$12 to \$10

Implication: Residents appear more willing to support funding for public transportation in 2024.





Key Finding Eight: While the vast majority of commuters drive to work/school, more have used public transportation in 2024.

- Over 60% of residents are employed (full time or part time) or are students, down slightly from 2019
- Commuters mostly drive alone to work or school (83%), down slightly from 2019 mostly due to remote work/school
- Commuters mostly use city streets (49%), up slightly from 2019
- Over half (56%) of commuters have used public transit, up 14% from 2019 primarily via occasional bus transit
- Better infrastructure is most likely to increase public transit usage more routes, more frequent service, real-time info

Key Finding Nine: Residents are slightly more supportive of funding public transportation including via a tax increase and more likely to feel public transportation needs to be expanded but residents still prioritize driving.

- More residents say funding public transportation is very important (+8%), feel a greater need to expand public transportation services (+7%) and are very supportive of a tax increase (+4%)
- Residents prioritize driving cars over public transit options, better public transit safety, small-town feel and natural areas
 - Residents are most divided on having public transit options (23% rank most important vs 31% rank least important)
- The Arkansas DOT, local governments, state government and the NWA Regional Planning Commission are the entities most likely to be viewed as responsible for planning transportation mobility in Northwest Arkansas

Implication: Residents support funding public transportation and better infrastructure could increase usage, but residents still place priority on and are mostly driving their personal vehicle to work and school.



Presentation Overview



Perceptions of Travel in the NWA Region

Current and Emerging Transportation Problems

Long Range Transportation Planning Issues

Non-Auto Transportation

Funding Issues

Regional Transportation Investment Priorities

Employment and School Related Travel

Public Transit Use

Demographics

₹ Consumer DNA



Participant Profile

A total of 834 Northwest Arkansas (NWA) residents participated in the original 2019 NWA Regional Transportation Study. A total of 420 residents of NWA participated in the second wave of the study.

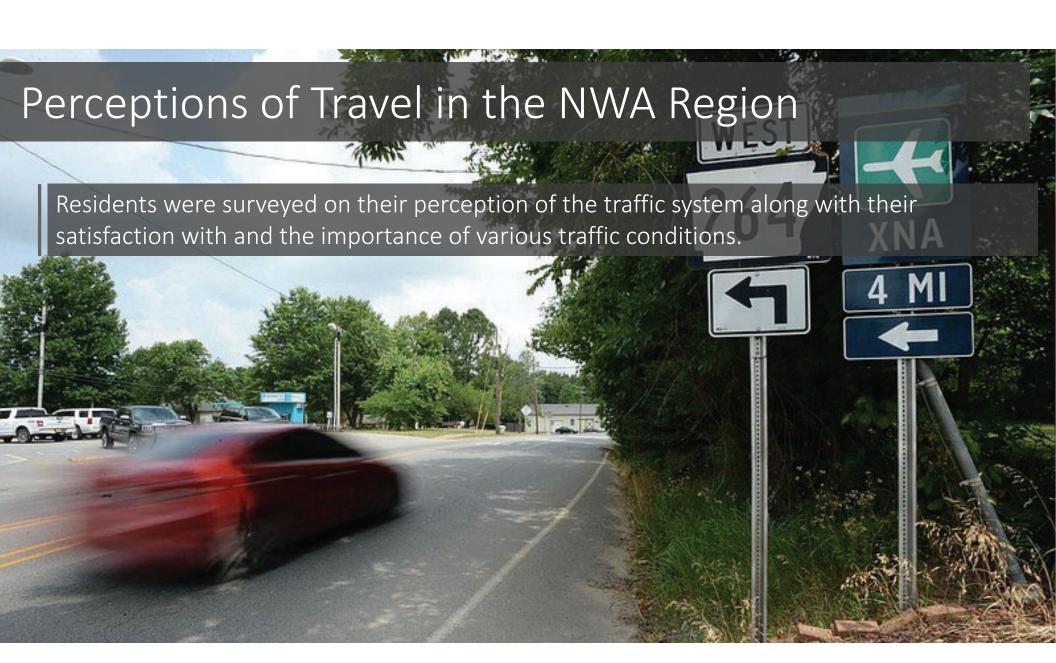


Participant Profile – 2024 Weighting Scheme

Both Benton and Washington county residents were asked to participate in the NWA Regional Transportation Study. More Benton county residents were surveyed in 2019 while the two counties were equally represented in 2024. The 2024 survey was then weighted by county, gender, income, ethnicity and Latino ancestry to be representative of the census and the 2019 survey. While answers are weighted, base sizes reflect the actual unweighted respondents who answered the question.

County of Residence		<u>Gender</u>		<u>Ethnicity</u>	
<u>Unweighted</u>	Weighted	<u>Unweighted</u>	<u>Weighted</u>	<u>Unweighted</u>	Weighted
50% Benton	56% Benton	34% Male	50% Male	86% White/Caucasian	86% White/Caucasian
50% Washington	44% Washington	66% Female	50% Female	5% Black/AA	5% Black/AA
				6% Native American	6% Native American
				5% Asian/OPI	7% Asian/OPI
				3% Other	3% Other
		<u>Income</u>		<u>Latino</u>	
		Unweighted	Weighted	Unweighted	Weighted
		Onweighted	VVCIgitica	<u>Oliweighteu</u>	vveignteu
		35% Under \$35K	22% Under \$35K	7% Latino ancestry	16% Latino ancestry
		35% Under \$35K	22% Under \$35K	7% Latino ancestry	16% Latino ancestry

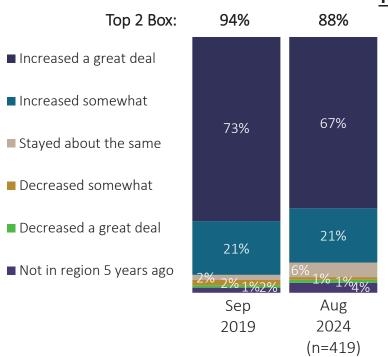




Traffic Congestion Compared to Five Years Ago

Although slightly fewer than in 2019, the vast majority of residents still says traffic congestion has increased in the past five years.

Traffic Congestion







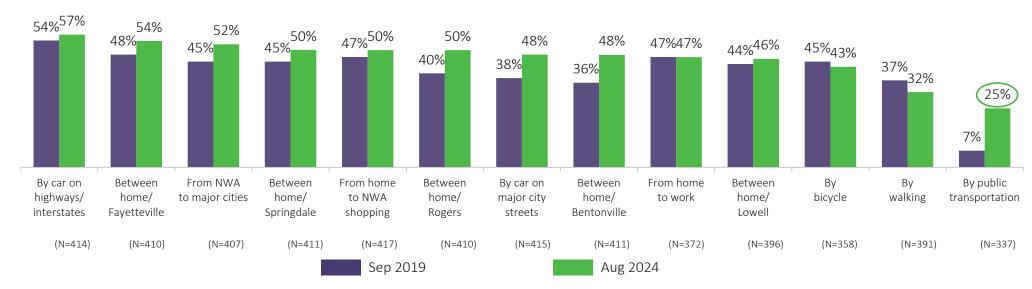
Q1. Compared to five years ago, would you say that traffic congestion in the Northwest Arkansas (NWA) region area has... Excluding "Don't Know"

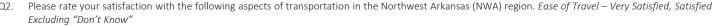
Transportation Satisfaction – Ease of Travel

Consumer DNA

Satisfaction with the ease of travel in Northwest Arkansas increased for all categories except for by walking, by bicycle and from home to work. Public transportation satisfaction more than tripled from 7% to 25%.

Ease of Travel - Top 2 Satisfaction



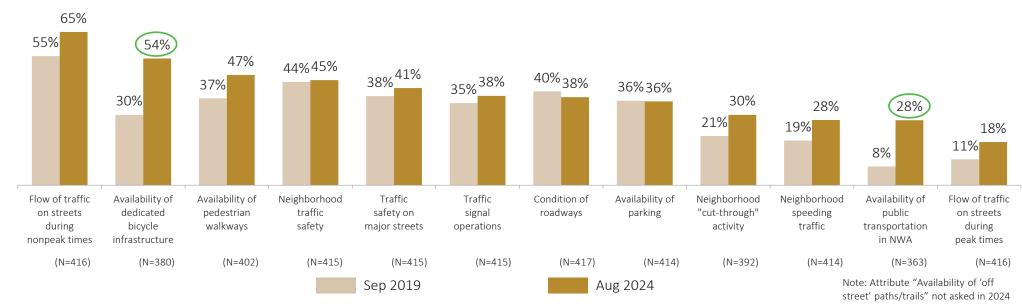




Transportation Satisfaction – Travel Conditions

Satisfaction with travel conditions also increased from 2019 except for roadway conditions and parking availability. Residents are much more satisfied with the availability of dedicated bicycle infrastructure (previously "on-street bicycle lanes") and public transportation. Overall, residents are not as satisfied with these travel conditions as they are with ease of travel.

Travel Conditions – Top 2 Satisfaction



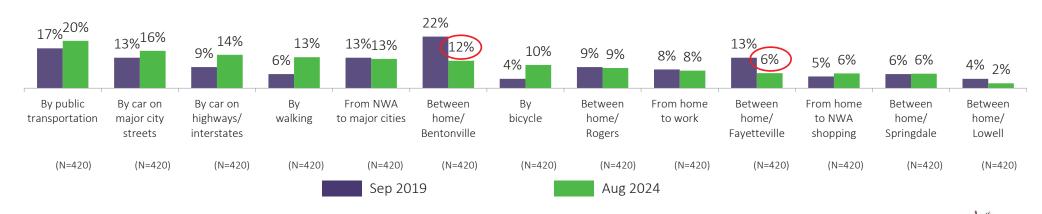




Transportation Importance – Ease of Travel

Residents place slightly greater importance on the ease of travel by walking, bicycle and car on highways in 2024 compared to 2019. Ease of travel between home and Bentonville and Fayetteville is not as important in 2024. Overall, ease of travel is not as important as the various travel conditions.

Ease of Travel – Top 4 Importance



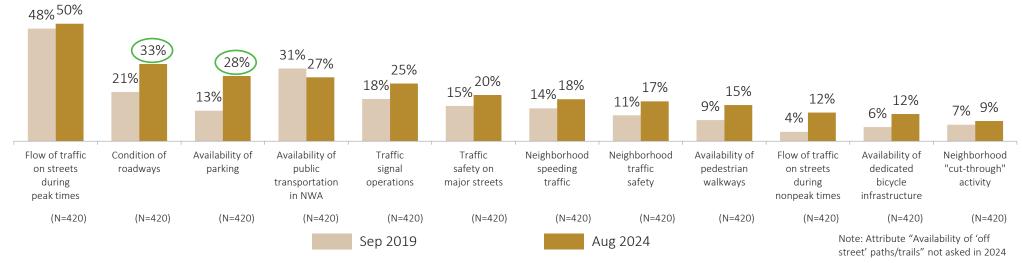




Transportation Importance – Travel Conditions

Overall, residents rate the various travel conditions more important than ease of travel. Importance increased the most from 2019 for availability of parking and roadway conditions. As noted previously, the 2024 attribute "dedicated bicycle infrastructure" is being compared to the 2019 attribute "on-street bicycle lanes".

Travel Conditions – Top 4 Importance



3. Please rank your top FOUR aspects of transportation you think community leaders in the Northwest Arkansas (NWA) region should emphasize most over the next 10 years. Top 4 Importance



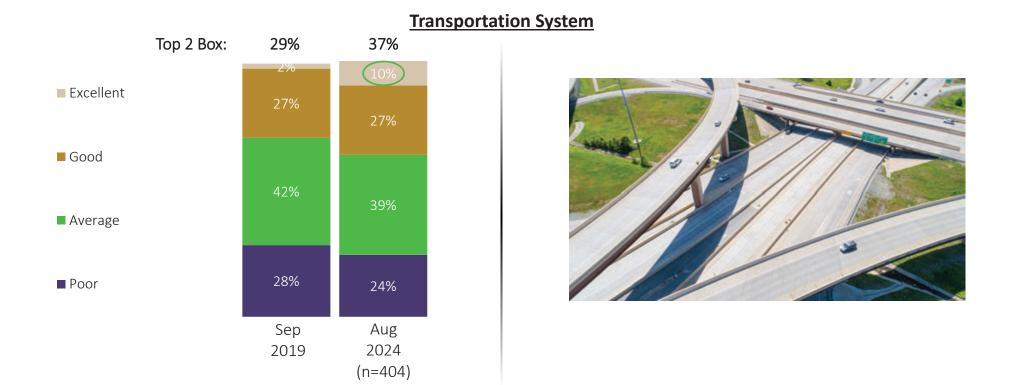


Transportation System

Excluding "Don't' Know"

Consumer DNA

Residents rate the NWA transportation system slightly higher in 2024. About 10% rated the system "Excellent" in 2024 compared to only 2% in 2019.



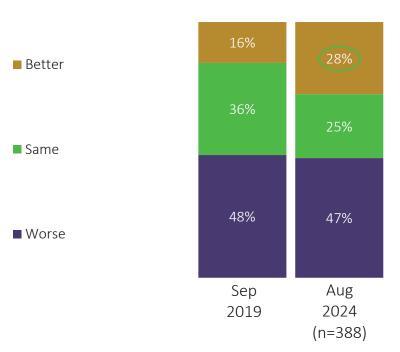


Overall, would you rate the transportation system in the NWA region as Excellent, Good, Average, or Poor?

Rush Hour Congestion Compared to Other Cities

Although more residents in 2024 say NWA rush hour congestion is better than other cities, almost half still say congestion is worse.

Rush Hour Congestion







Q5. Do you feel that traffic congestion at rush hour in the NWA region is better or worse than rush hour congestion in other cities of comparable size that you have visited? Excluding "Don't know"

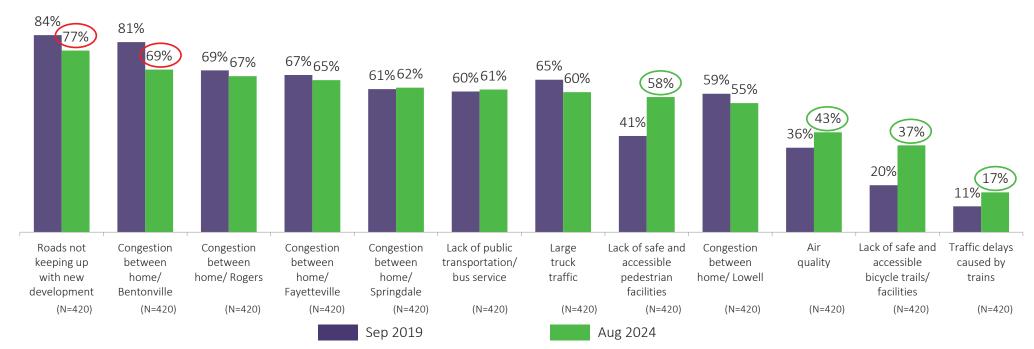


Transportation Problems in NWA Region

ConsumerDNA

The top two issues are still the same in 2024 but are not as problematic as they were in 2019 – roads keeping up with new development and Bentonville congestion. Most of the other transportation problems are still viewed similarly in 2024. Lack of pedestrian facilities, lack of bicycle infrastructure, air quality and train traffic are all bigger problems in 2024.

Transportation Problems



For each of the following, please indicate whether you think the issue is a "Current Problem," an "Emerging Problem," "Not a Problem", or "Not Sure" in the Northwest Arkansas region.

Current Problem, Emerging Problem

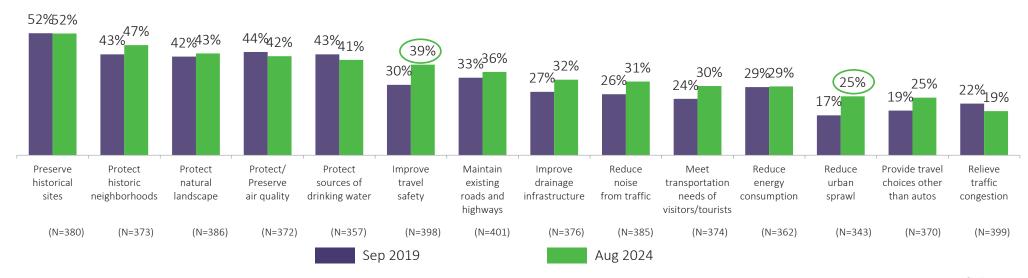


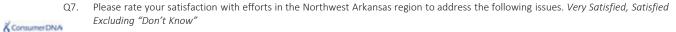


Long Range Planning Issues Satisfaction

Overall, satisfaction with long range planning is similar in 2024 compared to 2019. Satisfaction increased the most from 2019 for improving travel safety and reducing urban sprawl.

Top 2 Satisfaction



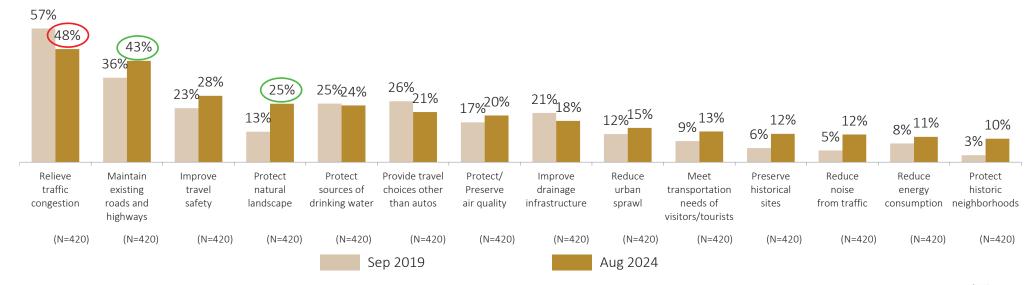


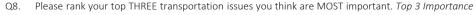


Long Range Planning Issues Importance

The most important long range planning issues remained the same in 2024 – relieving traffic congestion (thought not as important) and maintaining existing infrastructure (slightly more important). Protecting natural landscapes is more important in 2024.

Top 3 Importance







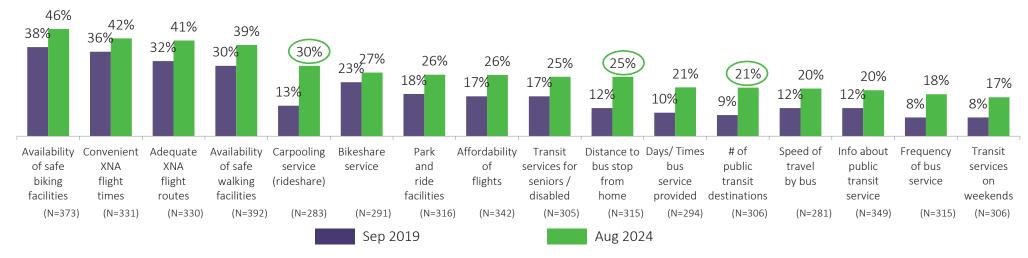


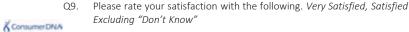


Non-Auto Transportation Satisfaction

Satisfaction with public transportation (including air travel) increased for all options surveyed, particularly for carpooling, bus stop distance from home and the number of public transit destinations available.

Top 2 Satisfaction



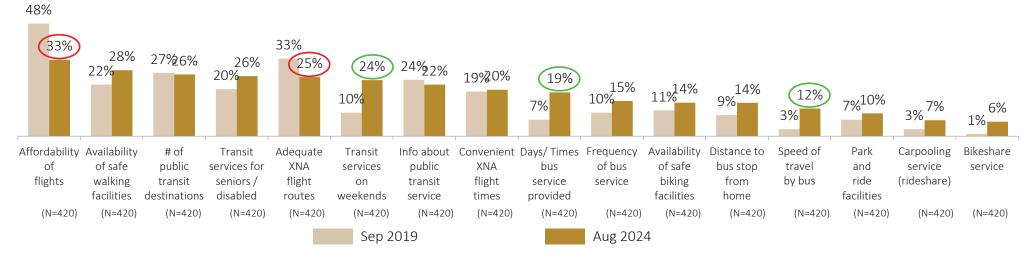


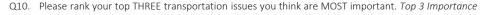


Non-Auto Transportation Importance

The importance of affordable flights and adequate XNA flight routes both decreased in 2024 while the importance of weekend transit service, days/times of bus service and speed of travel by bus increased.

Top 3 Importance





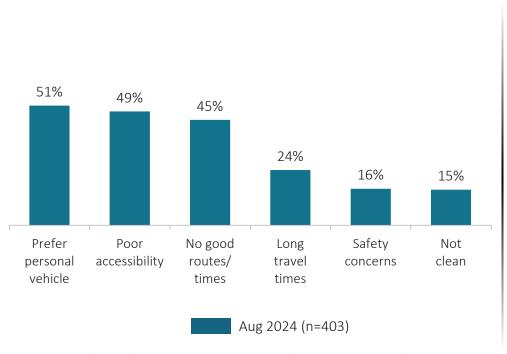


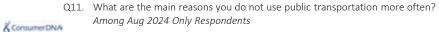


Main Reason Do Not Use Public Transportation More Often

A preference for their personal vehicle, poor accessibility and inconvenient routes and schedules are the biggest impediments to public transportation usage.

Main Reason





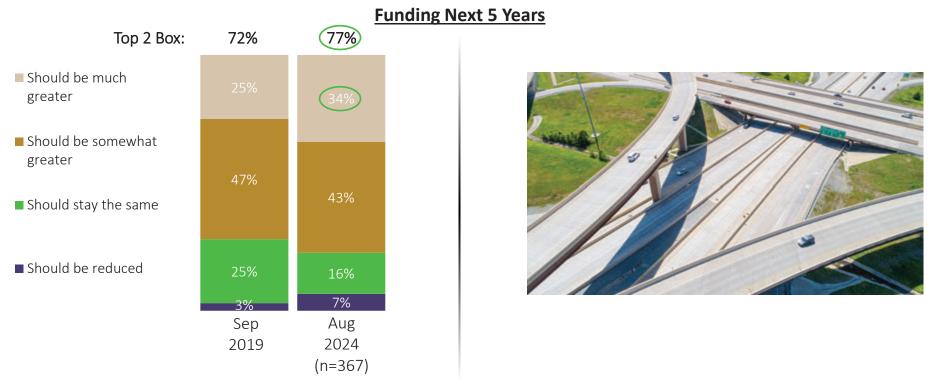


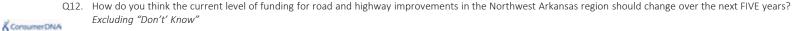




Road and Highway Funding Over Next Five Years

Support for "much greater" road and highway funding increased in 2024 compared to 2019, leading to overall slightly greater support for funding road and highway improvements in the next five years.







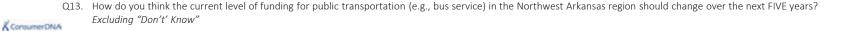
Public Transportation Funding Over Next Five Years

Similar to road and highway funding, support for "much greater" public transportation funding increased in 2024 compared to 2019, leading to overall slightly greater support for funding public transportation in the next five years.

Top 2 Box: 74% 78% Should be much greater Should be somewhat greater Should stay the same 44% Should be reduced 22% Away Away Away Away Aug

2019





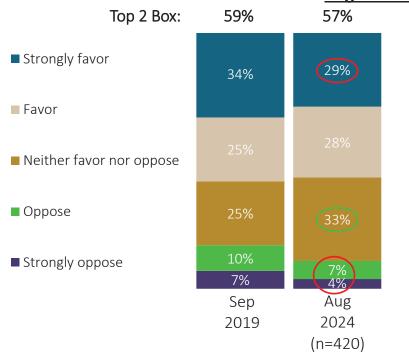
2024 (n=340)



Regional Passenger Rail Support

Both support for and opposition to regional passenger rail decreased in 2024 compared to 2019. There are now more residents who are neutral on the subject matter.

Regional Passenger Rail Support





Q14. To what degree do you favor or oppose developing a regional passenger rail project?





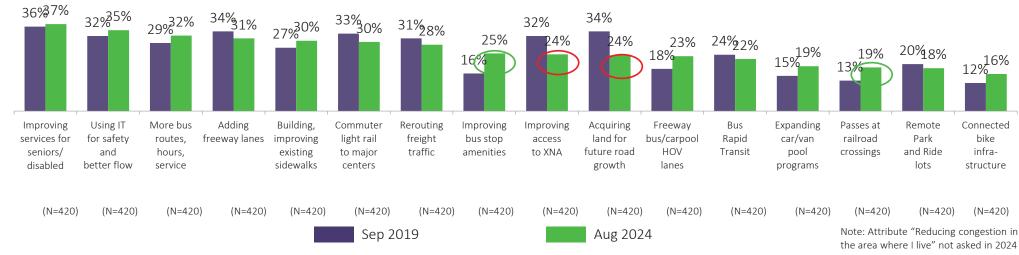


Regional Transportation Investment Priority

& Consumer DNA

Priority for improving bus stop amenities and over/under-passes for railroad crossings increased in 2024 compared to 2019 while acquiring land for future road growth and improving access to XNA decreased. Most other transportation improvement priority ratings in 2024 were similar to 2019.

High Priority



Q15. Using a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 means "Highest Priority" and 1 means "Lowest Priority," what priority should be placed on the following transportation improvements in the NWA region.

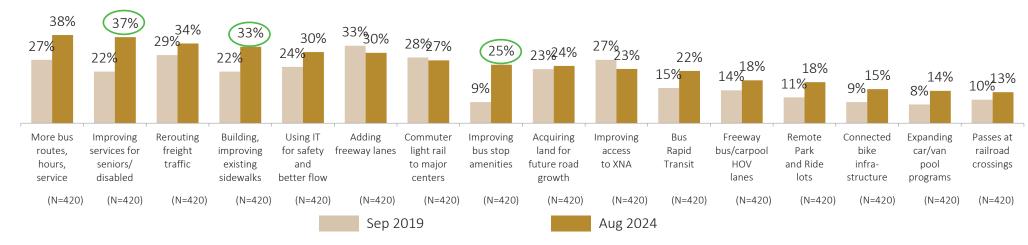
*Priority #10 (Highest Priority), Priority #9



Regional Transportation Investment Importance

The importance of improving bus stop amenities, improving services for seniors/disabled and improving sidewalks all increased by double-digits in 2024.

Top 4 Importance



Q16. Please rank your top FOUR transportation issues you think are MOST important. Top 4 Importance

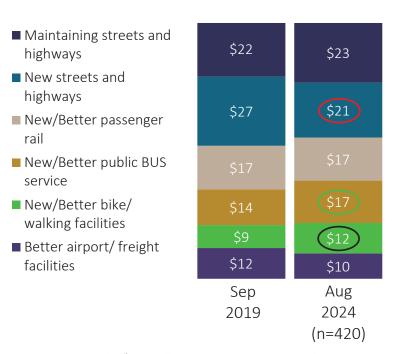




Transportation Funding Allocation

Compared to 2019, residents want slightly more funding for public bus service and bike/walking facilities along with slightly less funding for new streets/highways.

Funding Allocation

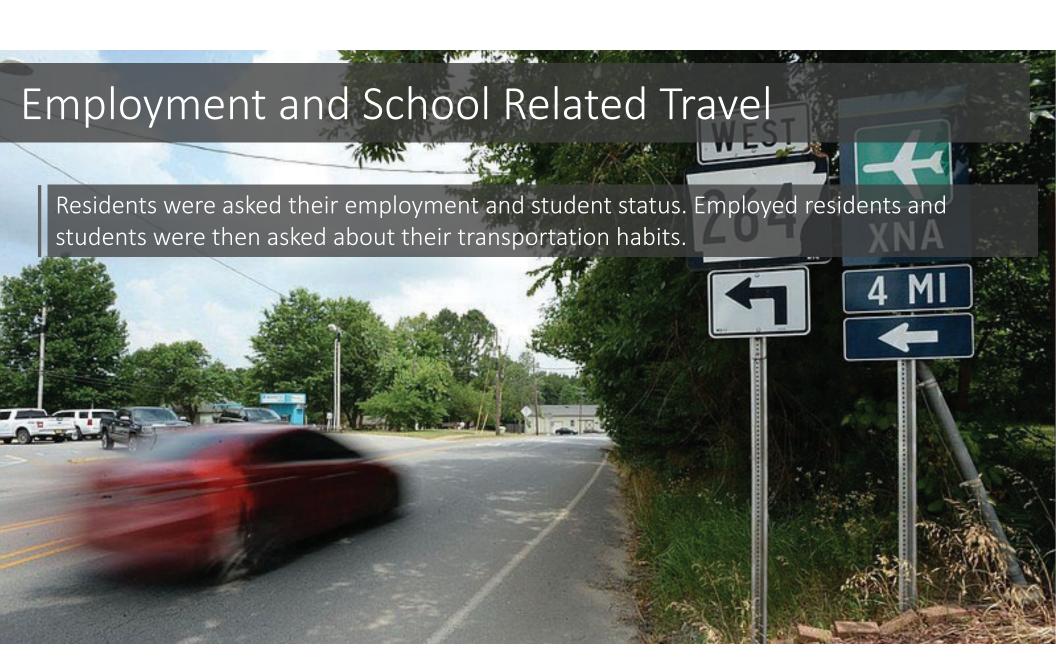




Q17. You have a total of \$100 to allocate among six transportation-funding categories. Please make the allocation of funding based on your priorities.



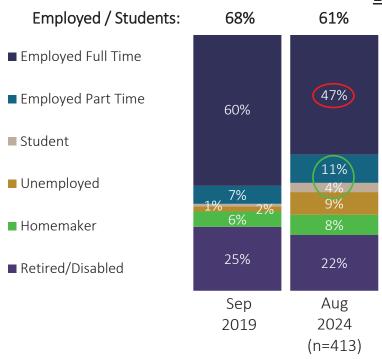




Employment Status

While there were fewer full-time employed residents in 2024 compared to 2019, there were slightly more part-time employed residents and student residents.

Employment Status





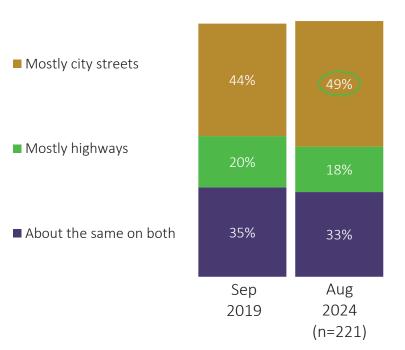
Q18. Which ONE of the following BEST describes your current employment status? Excluding "Other"



Work and School Routes

Those employed as well as students are slightly more likely to travel on mostly city streets in 2024 compared to 2019.

Work & School Routes





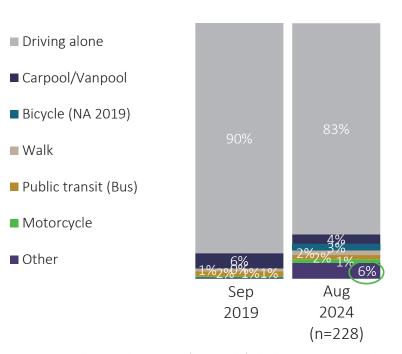
Q19b. Do you make most of your trips to/from [work / school] on city streets or highways? *Among Q18 Employed/Student Respondents Excluding "Don't know"*



Work and School Transport

Driving alone is still the overwhelmingly preferred method of transportation, but other options increased in 2024 compared to 2019. Most of this increase came in the "other" category with most residents mentioning remote work/school.

Work & School Transport





Q19c. Do you make most of your trips to/from [work / school] on city streets or highways? Among Q18 Employed/Student Respondents

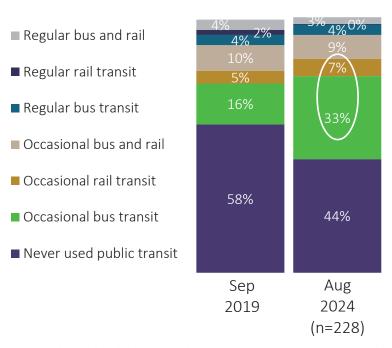




Public Transit Usage

More employed/student residents are using public transportation in 2024 compared to 2019, primarily via occasional bus transit.

Work & School Public Transit Usage





Q19d. Which one of the following BEST describes your past experience with any public transit? Among Q18 Employed/Student Respondents



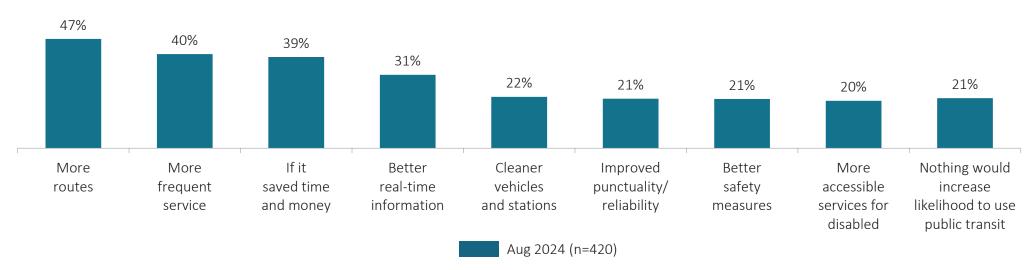




Improvement That Would Increase Likelihood of Using Public Transit

More routes run more frequently with real time information are the top improvements that would increase usage of public transportation, especially if it saved residents time and money.

Public Transit Improvements



Q20. What improvements would make you more likely to use public transportation?

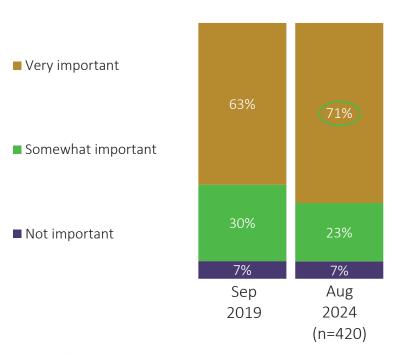
Among Aug 2024 Only Respondents



Importance of Local Government Funding Public Transportation

While residents are more likely to view local government support and funding of public transit as "very important" in 2024 compared to 2019, there were differences in how this question was asked. In 2024, a 5-point scale was used which was converted to a 3-point scale for comparison to 2019. Also, the option "Not sure" was included in 2019 but not in 2024 so the 2019 data was reallocated to exclude "Not sure" responses so the data could be compared to 2024.

Local Government Funding Importance







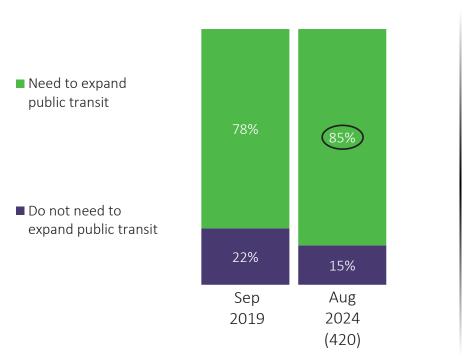


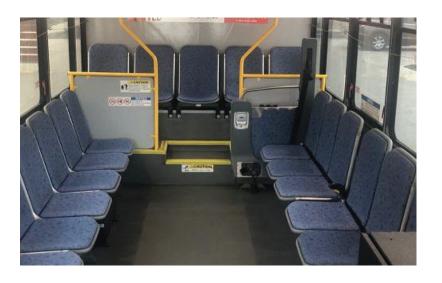


Expand Public Transportation in Benton and Washington Counties

Residents in 2024 feel a greater need to expand public transportation services compared to 2019.

Expand Public Transportation





Q22. Do you think expanded public transportation services are needed in Benton and Washington Counties?

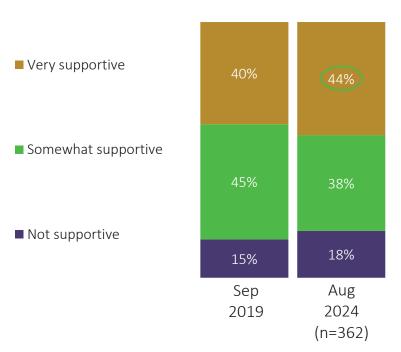




Support for Tax Increase to Expand Public Transportation

Overall, those "very supportive" of a tax increase to support expanding public transportation increased slightly in 2024 compared to 2019 but so did those who are "not supportive" of a tax increase. Similar to Q21, a 5-point scale was used in 2024 and "Not sure" was not an option. The 2019 data was reallocated to exclude "Not sure" and the 2024 data was converted to a 3-point scale to compare 2019 and 2024 data.

Tax Increase Support





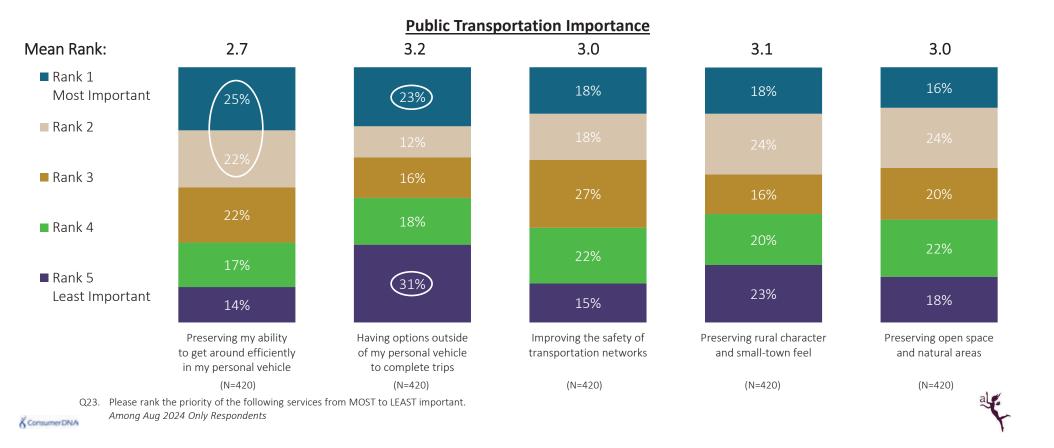
Q22a. How supportive would you be of paying an increase in taxes to support expanded public transportation services in Benton and Washington Counties?

Among Q22 Need to Expand Public Transit Respondents



Public Transportation Importance

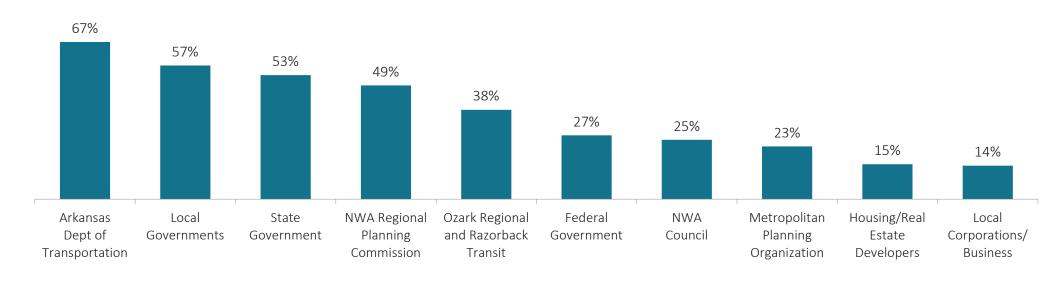
Almost half of all respondents rated preserving their ability to drive in their personal vehicle as their most or second most important priority among the five transit issues surveyed. Although almost a quarter of respondents rated having options as their most important attribute, almost one-third rated it as their least important attribute.



Entity Responsible for Planning NWA Transportation

About half or more of the residents view the Arkansas DOT, local governments, state government and the NWA Regional Planning Commission as being responsible for planning transportation mobility in Northwest Arkansas.

Planning NWA Transportation



Aug 2024 (n=368)

Q24. Who do you think of as responsible for planning transportation and mobility in Northwest Arkansas?

**Among Aug 2024 Only Respondents. Excluding "Don't know"



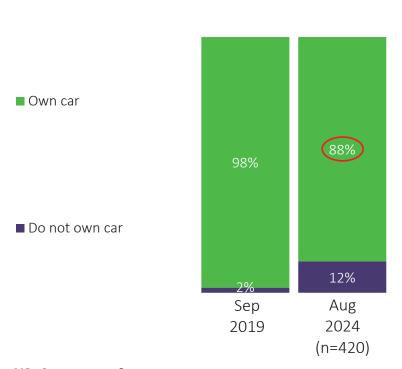
Demographics

In addition to gender, household composition, household income and ethnicity, residents were asked about their bicycle ownership and car ownership as well as their usage of public transportation.



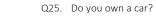
Car Ownership

While car ownership declined in 2024 compared to 2019, the vast majority of residents do own cars.



Own Car





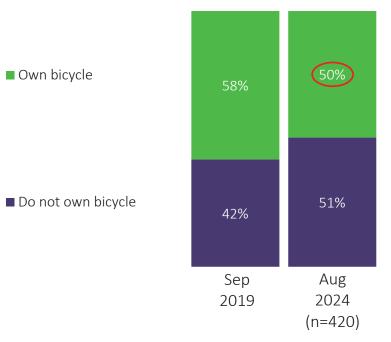




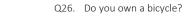
Bicycle Ownership

Bicycle ownership declined in 2024 compared to 2019.

Own Bicycle







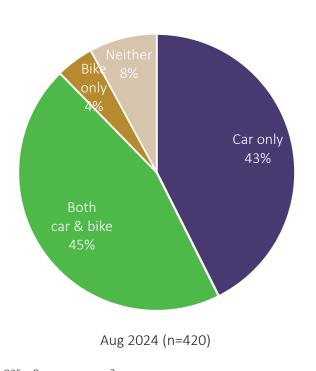




Car and Bicycle Ownership

The vast majority of 2024 residents have either a car or both a car and bicycle as possible modes of transportation. Just under 1 in 10 residents have no form of transportation (car or bicycle) while about 1 in 25 only have a bicycle for transportation. Unfortunately, there was no corresponding data from 2019 to compare against the 2024 data.

Own Car &/Or Bicycle





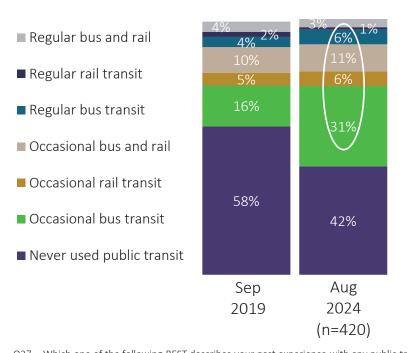
Q25. Do you own a car?
Q26. Do you own a bicycle?



Public Transit Usage

Similar to the employed/student residents, more residents overall are using public transportation in 2024 compared to 2019, primarily via occasional bus transit.

Public Transit Usage





Q27. Which one of the following BEST describes your past experience with any public transit?

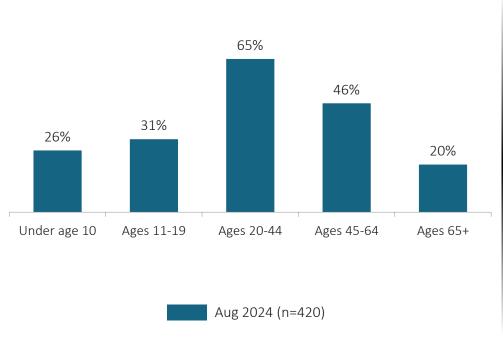




Household Composition – Age

Most residents in 2024 have people age 20-44 or people age 45-64 living in their household. Unfortunately, there was no corresponding data from 2019 to compare against the 2024 data.

Household Composition





Q28. How many persons, including yourself, are currently living in your household?



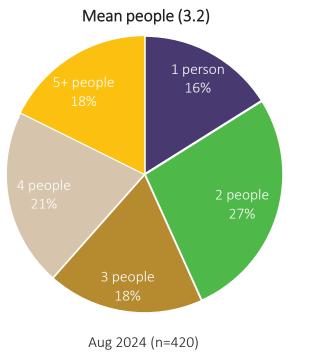


Household Composition – Size

Just over 15% of residents live alone while the remainder live with at least one other person in their household. Overall, there are just over 3 people living in the average household.

Unfortunately, there was no corresponding data from 2019 to compare against the 2024 data.

Household Composition





Q28. How many persons, including yourself, are currently living in your household?

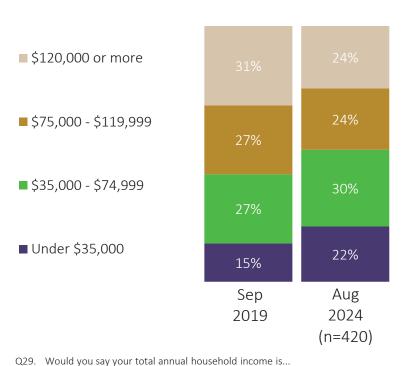




Annual Household Income

As noted in the Participant Profile section, annual household income is being weighted in 2024 to match census data. Income is slightly lower in 2024 compared to 2019.

Annual HH Income



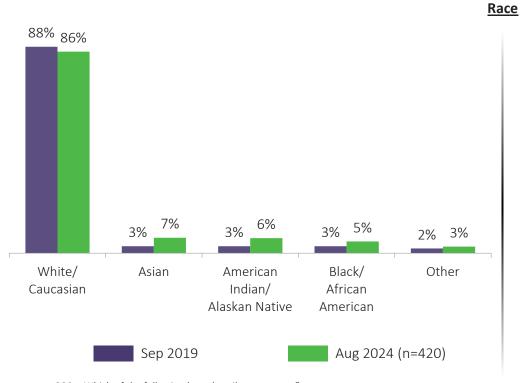






Race

As noted in the Participant Profile section, race is being weighted in 2024 to match 2019 and census data. Because this is a multiple response question, race is slightly different in 2024 compared to 2019.







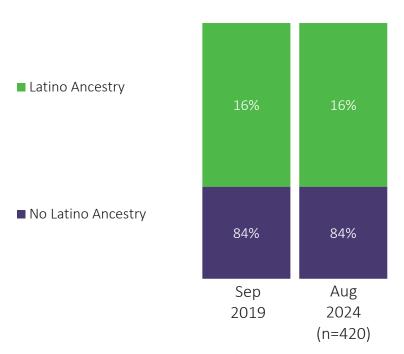




Latino Ancestry

Latino ancestry is also being weighted in 2024 to match 2019 and census data.

Latino Ancestry





Q31. Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or other Spanish ancestry?





Gender

Gender is also being weighted in 2024 to match 2019 and census data.

<u>Gender</u>













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