

Downtown Saint Paul Commuter Survey October 2021

Introduction

In 2021 the City of Saint Paul partnered with Move Minnesota, the non-profit Transportation Management Organization for the City of Saint Paul, to conduct a survey of downtown employees. The goal of the survey was to help the city develop modern policies and projects which support evolving transportation needs, by better understanding changing commuting patterns, specifically the changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This survey will be administered again in 2022 to get longitudinal data and to keep up with the evolving return to office plans.

Covid-19 transformed the commuting habits for many downtown Saint Paul employees. Remote work, once a relatively rare practice in Minnesota, became the norm for many office-based employees in Saint Paul. Transit ridership plummeted while downtown streets and parking lots emptied. Park and ride locations sat [dormant](#) as commuters began to work at home and/or avoided transit out of fear of COVID-19. This survey was targeted at downtown employees who work in an office setting. While we realize commute patterns changed for essential workers as well, especially considering transit service changes, those workers were not the primary focus of this survey.

This report will:

- Explain the survey methodology.
- Show demographics of respondents and their employers.
- Illustrate the key findings from survey questions.
- Propose recommendations for policy and infrastructure changes.

Survey Methodology

This survey was conducted online through Survey Monkey and was circulated via email. The survey was available Friday, October 22, 2021 to Friday, November 12, 2021. The goal of the outreach was to reach large employers with employees who typically are in downtown offices from 9am-5pm.

The City of Saint Paul staff distributed the survey to downtown employers. The Saint Paul Downtown Alliance shared the survey in their weekly e-newsletters. Move Minnesota shared the survey in their October e-newsletter and sent the survey to a number of large downtown employers. Move Minnesota also shared the survey on social media platforms:

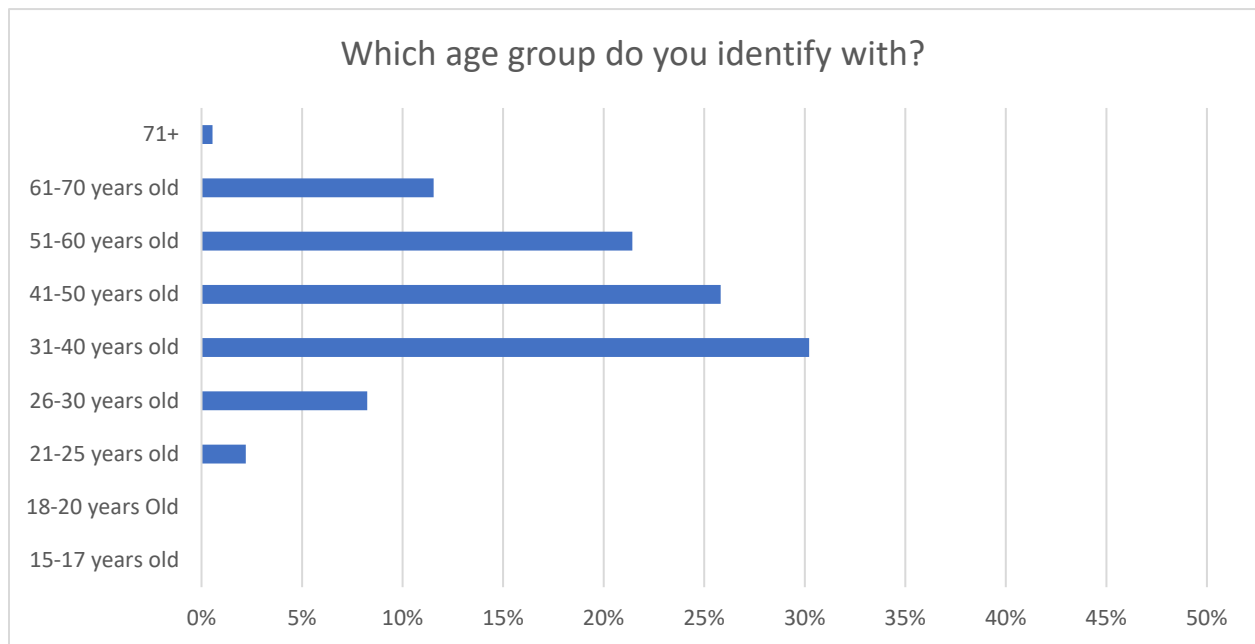
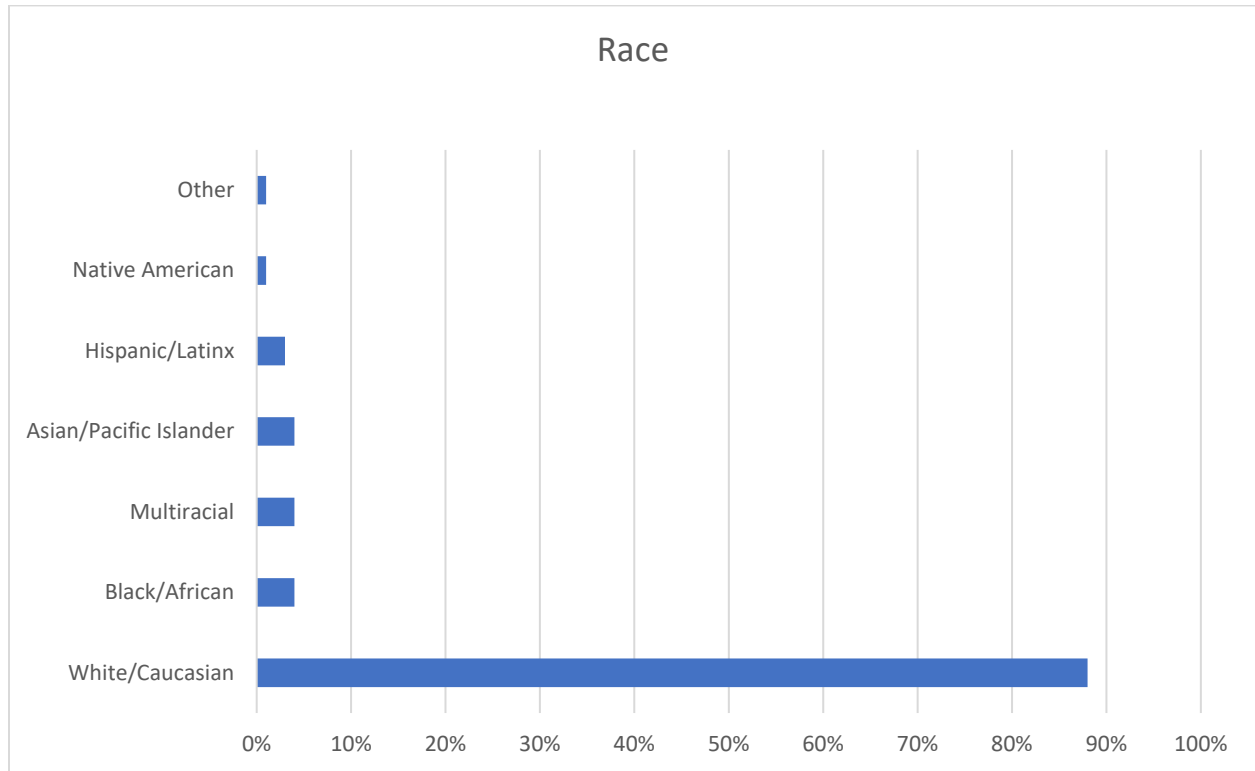
Twitter: <https://twitter.com/moveminnesota/status/1450206843670867968?s=21>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/8888642334/posts/10158383429992335/?d=n>

Two gift certificates were offered for those who completed the survey and shared their contact information.

Respondent demographics and employers

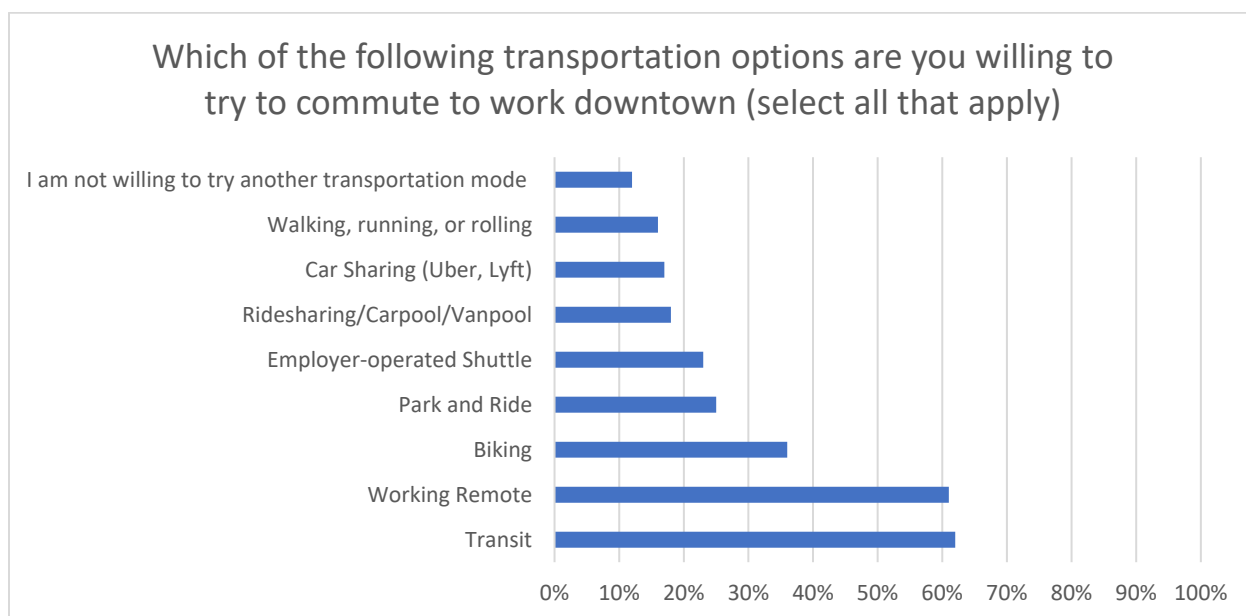
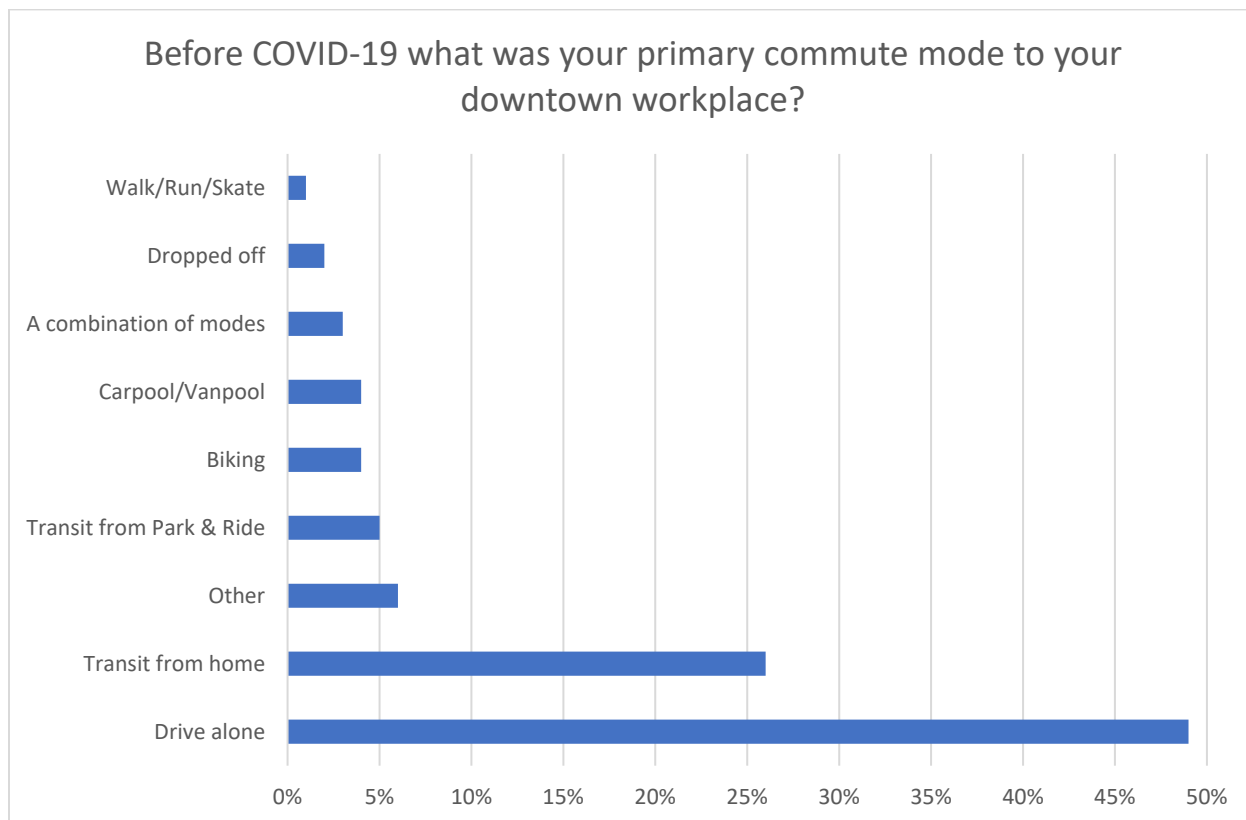
There were 201 survey respondents and the majority were White, female identifying, and between the ages of 31-60. The majority of respondents were parents or guardians of children under the age of 18. While the largest number of responses came from City of Saint Paul employees (41%), there were many responses from employees at Isthmus Engineering (11%), the State of Minnesota (8%), and Ramsey County (6%).



Survey Findings:

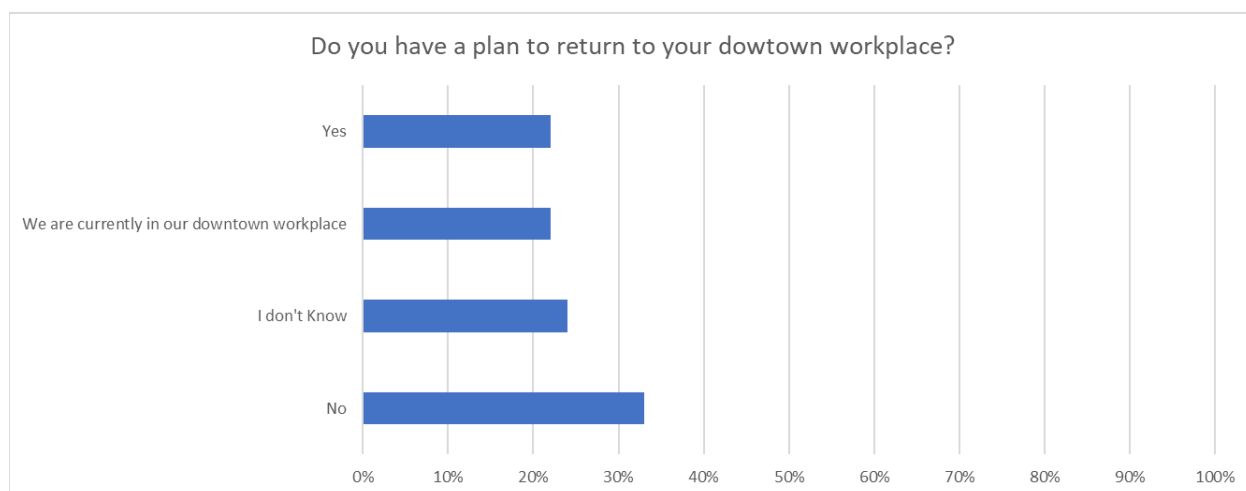
Mode Choice

- Prior to the pandemic 50% of survey respondents used sustainable transportation methods
- Approximately one third of respondents took transit before COVID-19 either from their homes or from a Park and Ride or from a combination of modes.
- Most respondents do not plan on altering their mode choice upon a return to the office.
- There is a 4% projected increase of driving alone, a 5% decrease in transit, and a 2% increase in active transportation.
- When asked what transportation options commuters were willing to try we found them to be open minded with 62% willing to try transit, 61% working remote and 36% biking.
- Only 12% of commuters said they would not be willing to try a different commute mode for getting to their downtown workplace.



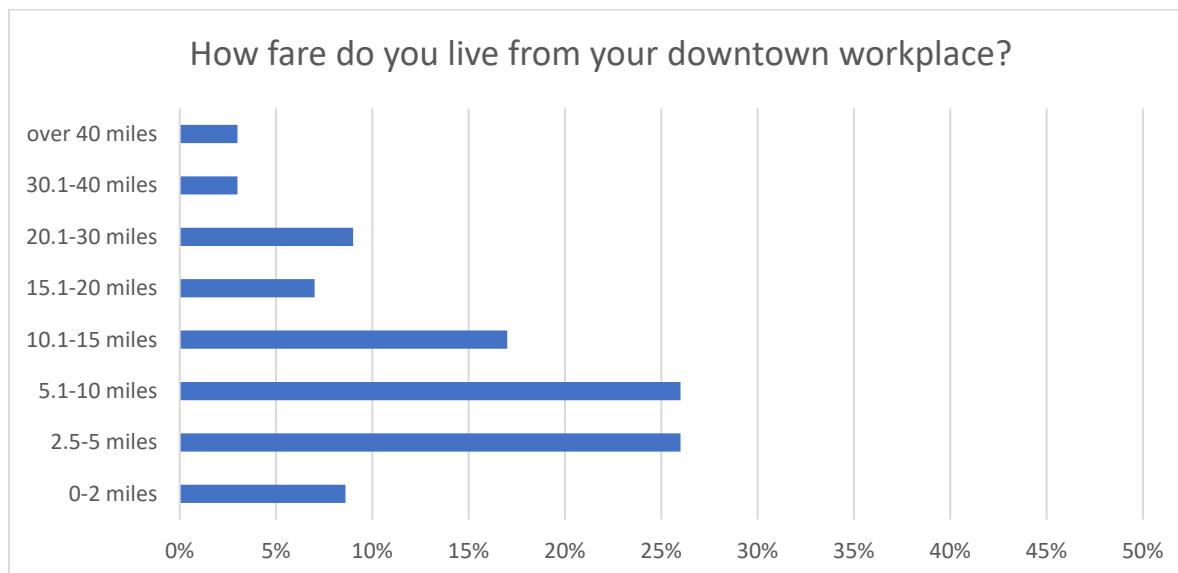
Returning to the office

- When asked about plans for a return date to their downtown workplace, 33% of survey respondents said they didn't have a return date and 24% said they didn't know. This means that over 50% of employees surveyed didn't have a plan to return to the downtown workplace at the time of asking.
- Of those that did have a plan to return to the office over 90% had plans to return sometime in January.
- This survey was administered before the outbreak of the Omicron variant which will have changed some employers return to office plans.



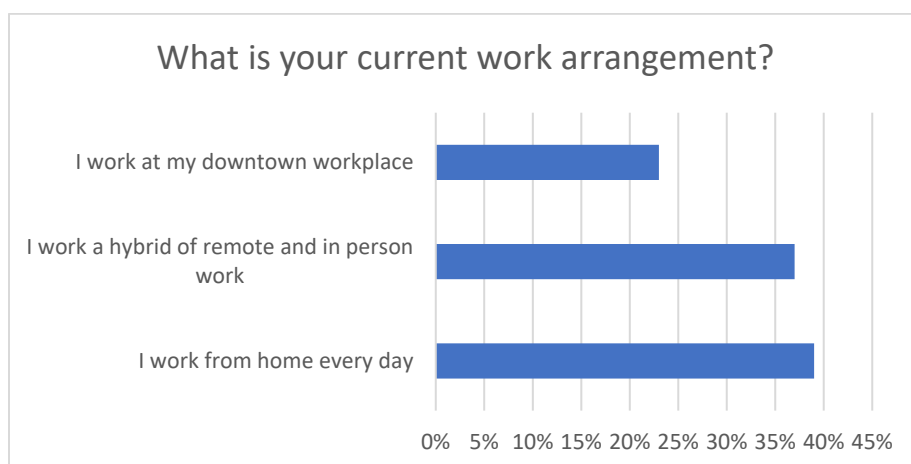
Commute distances

- A large percentage of respondents live close enough to their workplaces to be using active transportation. 9% of respondents live within 2 miles of their workplace and a further 26% live within 5 miles, yet only 7% plan to use active transportation to get to work upon their return.
- 60% of participants live within 10 miles of downtown. Before COVID-19 half 49% of the participants drove alone, but that means half used a sustainable transportation mode such as transit, bicycling, walking or carpool. When thinking about returning to work downtown, 54% thought they might drive alone. Of those who drive 30% are receiving free or subsidized parking from their employer. 27% pay daily and 15% have or had monthly contracts. For those who take transit, 32% pay for their own transit cost.



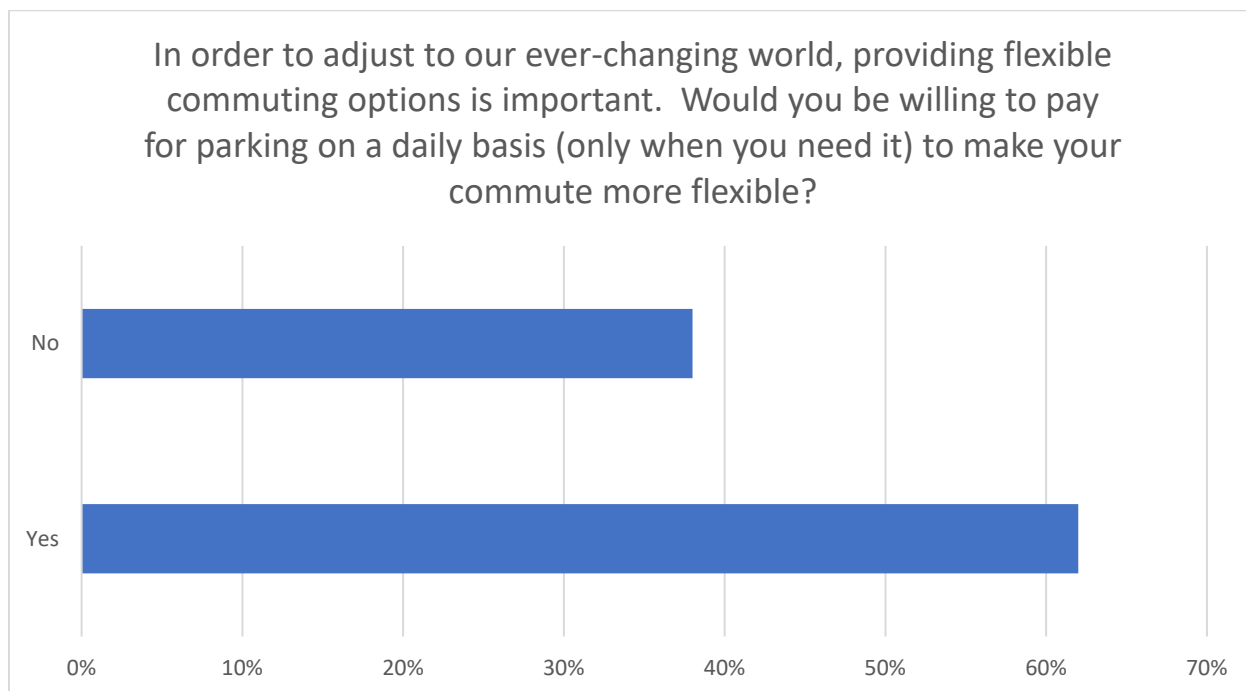
Remote Work Takeaways

- Remote work has exploded during the Covid-19 Pandemic.
- Currently 39% of respondents work remotely every single day whereas a further 37% work a hybrid model of remote and in-office.
- Respondents indicated the benefits of working from home were the time saving, money saving, and convenience.
- Over half of the respondents indicated that they feel a disconnect from their teammates working from home and many indicated they don't like the lack of exercise.



Parking stats.

- When asked how workers pay for parking at their downtown workplace 27% of respondents said they pay by the day.
- 62% of respondents said they would be willing to pay a daily parking fee.
- 70% of respondents with monthly parking contracts said they would be willing to switch to a daily contract.
- 48% of respondents receiving free parking would be willing to pay a daily fee.



Recommendations for strategies to reach the city's goals.

All recommendations are based on the goals set out by the [Saint Paul Climate Action and Resilience Plan](#) and the [Saint Paul 2040 Plan](#). Both of these plans identify transportation emissions as one of the largest sources of carbon emissions in Saint Paul. Both plans call for the reduction of vehicle miles traveled by 40% by the year 2040. These recommendations are further informed by changing travel patterns caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and the responses to this survey.

Recommendations in brief

Actions for the City of Saint Paul:

- Support more frequent transit service to downtown
- Support bicycle infrastructure projects that connect to downtown
- Support policies to transition parking lots to a daily market rate
- Promote HourCar and Evie Carshare.

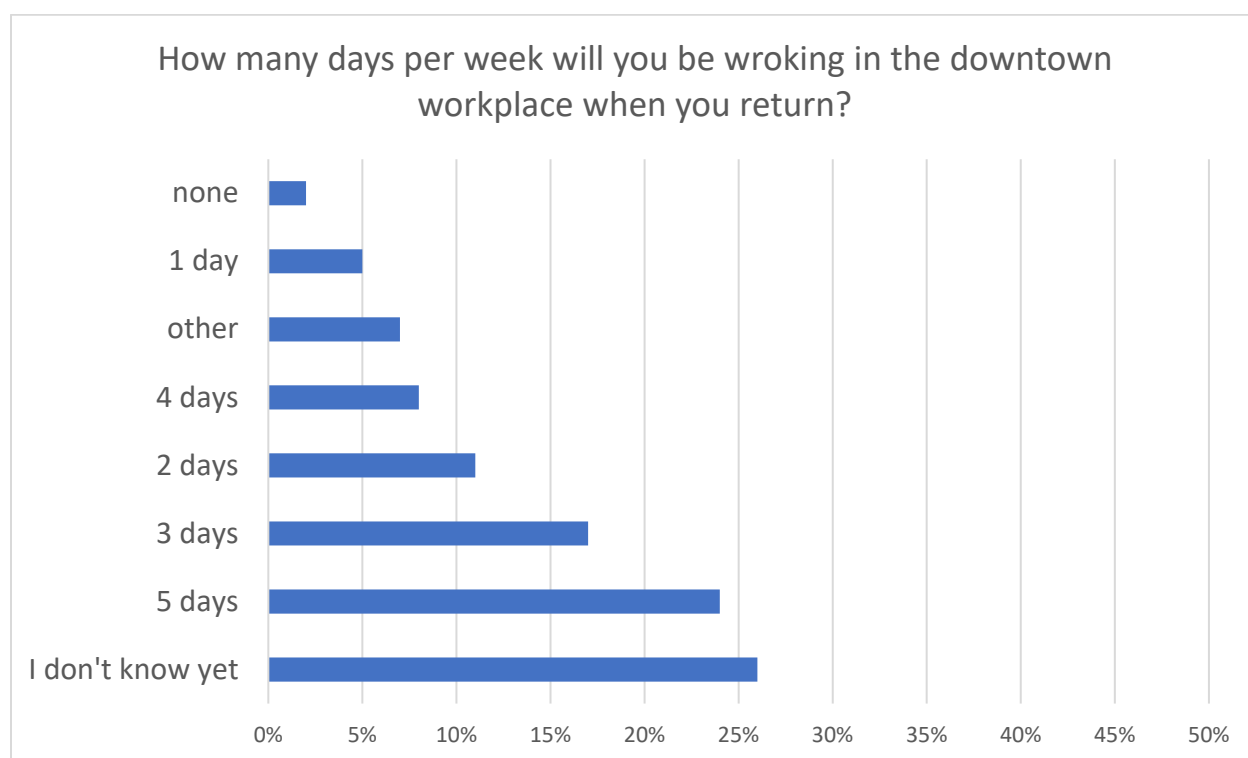
Actions for employers:

- Provide transit assistance to employees
- Transition monthly parking contracts to a daily market rate
- Provide workplace bike parking and showers
- Provide an active transportation commuter wellness program
- Promote telework work policies that allow flexibility and decrease overall commute travel needed.

Expanded policy recommendations

Policy makers and employers should promote daily market rate parking.

One of the biggest areas of opportunity for changing transportation behavior is transitioning parking fees from monthly and yearly contracts to a daily market rate. Both monthly and yearly parking contracts encourage commuters to extract the maximum value from their investment and encourage driving. These contracts generally benefit those who go to work five days a week however, our survey shows that many commuters don't plan on being in the office every day of the week. By switching parking fees to a daily model, you give commuters choice for transportation modes with each trip.



Employers should provide transit assistance.

41% of respondents replied that an employer provided transit pass would help them to get to work by transit. Metropass is a great value for commuters and employers who are still working in person routinely and it should be promoted for businesses who have yet to sign up. The [My Fare Card List](#) is a more flexible option for employers who are seeing employees in the office less frequently, allowing employers to refill Go-To cards as much or as little as their employees need on a monthly basis.

Employers and policy makers should support bicycle infrastructure.

When asked what would assist commuters in getting to their workplace by bicycle the most popular response was “increased bike paths and infrastructure”. Officials should support new bike paths and infrastructure identified by the [Saint Paul Bicycle Plan](#) to support the 36% of employees who responded that they would be willing to try biking to their downtown workplace. But employers can help support bicycle commutes as well. 27% of survey takers responded that showers/lockers at their workplace would assist them in getting to their workplace by bicycle and 23% said the same about increased bicycle parking at their workplace.

Appendix:

Survey Preamble:

“Thank you for taking this 10 minute survey about employee commuting patterns and preferences to downtown Saint Paul. COVID-19 has drastically changed how and when we move about the city, particularly to office-based employment downtown. The City of Saint Paul and Move Minnesota are partnering on this survey to understand your new transportation patterns and develop modern policies and projects to support your evolving transportation needs. Because our patterns are in flux, we anticipate asking you these questions again in 2022 to see how patterns are changing. We appreciate you taking the time to complete the survey and we are offering a drawing for two gift cards as a small token of our appreciation.”