



King County
METRO

Moving forward together

Rider/ Non-Rider: 2022 Annual Report

Understanding Riders and Non-Riders
in King County



Introduction

King County Metro (Metro) believes that mobility is a human right—one that for many is not yet realized. Historic, systematic, and persistent inequities have affected access to safe, affordable, and useful transit options. We recognize that the effort to secure mobility as a human right requires decisions that assure transit is accessible, safe, and climate conscious. To understand how Metro can continue to advance the goals of equitable, safe, and sustainable mobility options, we rely on the input of King County residents, and surveys are one way we receive that input.

For decades, King County Metro has surveyed both transit riders and non-riders in the county. The Rider/Non-Rider (RNR) survey is designed to collect and track data pertaining to ridership, travel and commute patterns, barriers to ridership, satisfaction with various elements of service, and demographics. This report shares high-level findings from the survey — including who in King County uses transit, when, and why/why not. It also provides an overview of residents' experiences with King County Metro's bus service. By continuously collecting these data, we are able to provide insights that help guide our agency's decisions and investments aimed at improved transit and enhanced mobility.

Key Takeaways

King County residents are generally supportive of public transit, and are most likely to use transit when it makes sense to do so. Whether or not public transit makes sense depends on convenience—e.g., how far they have to go to access transit, travel time to the desired destination—as well as whether they feel transit is safe and reliable.

In the latter three quarters of 2022 (Q2 through Q4)¹,

- Transit riders were more likely to have lower household incomes, be renters, be younger, and live in more transit dense areas
- A majority of transit users rode less than 5 times in a 30-day period
- Those who commuted to areas well-served by transit, like the downtown core and university areas, were more likely to be frequent users
- Less frequent riders were more likely to use transit for fun or social events, as well as special events, and an occasional work trip

Survey Methodology

- Stratified, random-sample survey designed to be representative of King County, as well as each of its three sub-regions (East King County, South King County, and Seattle/North King County)
- Address-based sample that includes oversamples of households in Metro's [equity priority areas](#) as well as multifamily dwellings (apartments, condos, etc.). Survey participants are recruited via postcard, and each postcard includes a unique participant code that the respondent can enter in an online survey platform or over the phone. Each of the three quarters of data collection (Q2-Q4) had between 2,400-2,600 respondents

¹Between Q1 and Q2 of 2022, Rider/Non-Rider underwent a redesign, which included a new sampling frame, questionnaire design, and other changes that make it challenging to combine with the first quarter of data collection in Q1 of 2022.

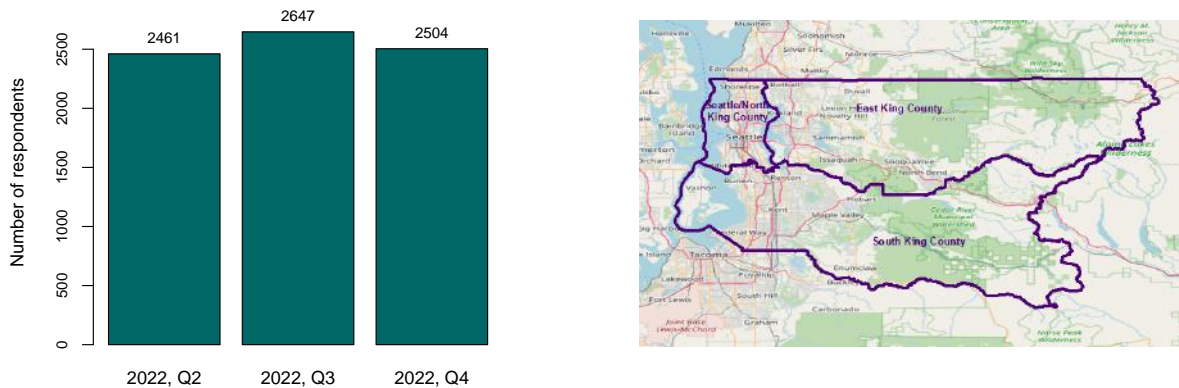


Figure 1: Sample size and sample areas

- Survey data are weighted to correct for any disproportionate response rates that emerge as the result of the random sample. These weights account for irregularities in response rates across age, gender, household income, geographic region of the county, among other issues.

Attitudes About Public Transit

King County residents are largely supportive of and value public transit. Regardless of whether they use it, the majority of RNR respondents (95%) agree that access to public transit is important, and 80% agree that they think about the environmental impacts of their transportation choices. In addition, most (61%) agree that they enjoy using public transit.

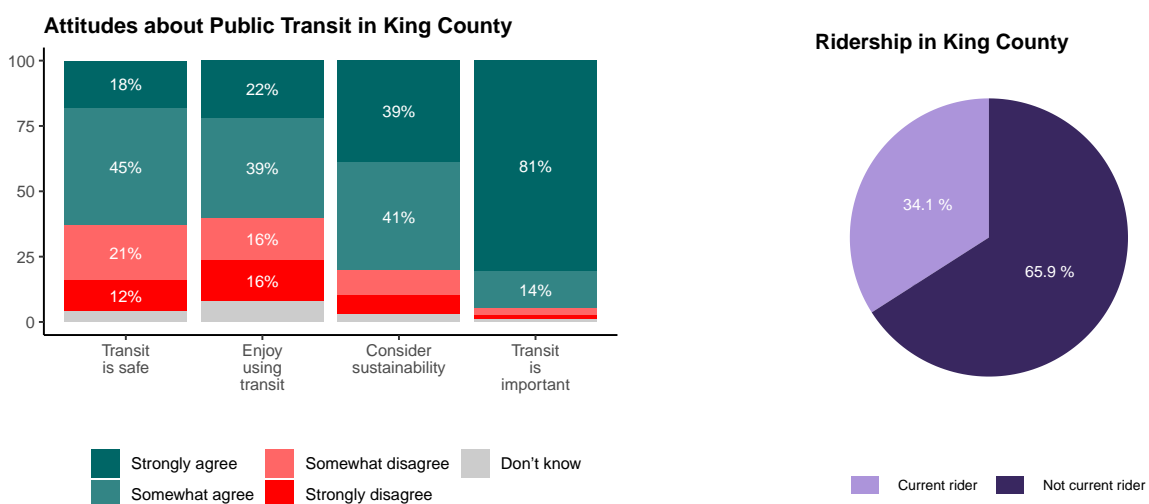


Figure 2: Attitudes and Ridership in King County

Despite the pro-transit sentiment in the county, only a third of respondents (34%) report using transit themselves in the 30 days prior to completing the survey.

In 2022, transit ridership was diverse although some patterns were clear.

- A higher percentage of younger and lower-income household residents reported using transit.
- Where people live and their home ownership status also seems to be a key determinant of ridership. A significantly higher percentage of those living in the city of Seattle or North King County, and renters are likely to report riding than those in other geographic area or housing situations, respectively.

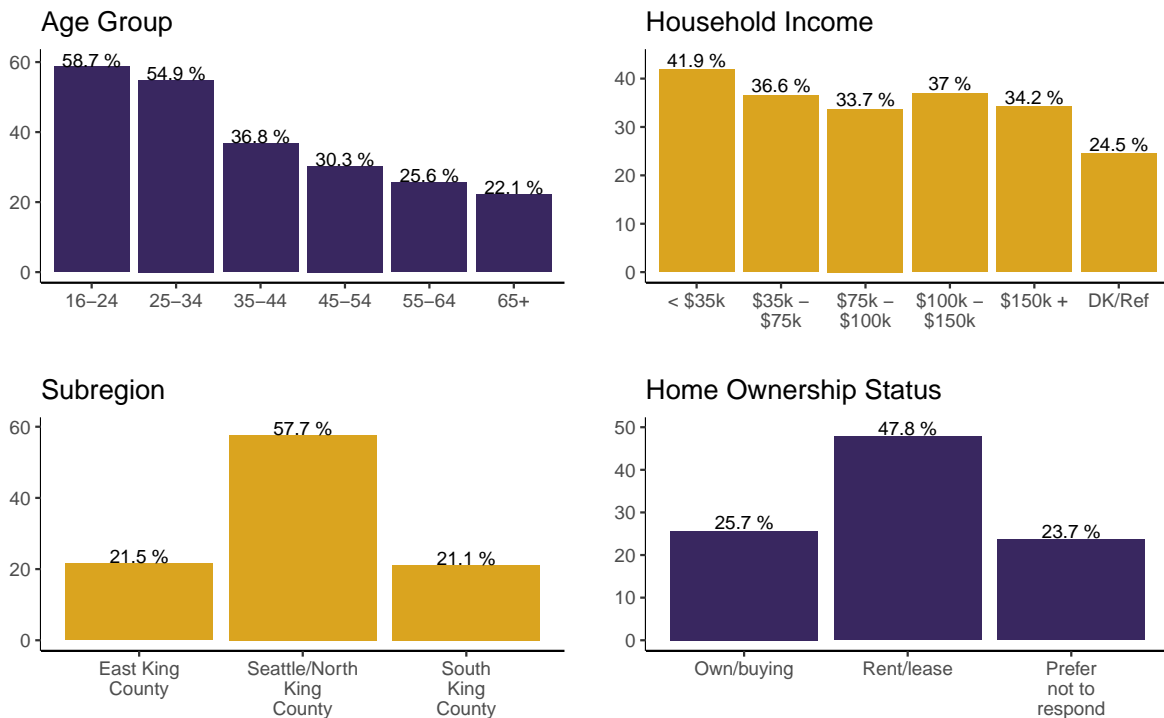


Figure 3: Ridership across demographic subgroups

Most people (63%) used transit infrequently (i.e., had completed five trips or less in the previous 30-days). That said, a sizable proportion of riders (21%) reported they made 10 or more transit trips in the last 30 days. While work-related travel was reported as a common purpose for transit trips, other types of trips were also common.

There were some differences among those who rode frequently, somewhat frequently, and infrequently, though all generally use transit when it makes sense to do so. In thinking about why people are using public transit then – it appears as though it is driven by practicality. A significant proportion of frequent transit riders are using transit frequently because it makes sense for them to do so. Their trip purposes, work and home locations, and things like family status make it convenient and advantageous to use transit. Infrequent riders, on the other hand, are using transit if doing so is easier than traveling via another mode.

Frequent Riders: 10+ transit trips per 30 days

Frequent riders are significantly more likely to live in Seattle and North King County, where transit networks are extensive and dense. This group of riders most often traveled to the downtown Seattle core and the University of Washington area – destinations that are also

well-served by transit.

Frequent riders used transit for a variety of reasons, including getting to and from work (65%), to access fun or social activities (47%), and for errands and shopping (46%). Over three-quarters of frequent riders (78%) regularly commuted to their job site. Of those making regular commutes, 74% commuted three to five times a week, and used transit to make many of these trips. In line with these ridership patterns, the most common times for ridership among frequent riders were morning (55%) and afternoon peak periods (53%). Midday weekday travel was also relatively common (41%), followed by Saturday and Sunday travel. Most frequent riders (75%), report having a vehicle in their household yet 66% report using public transit for most or all their transportation needs.

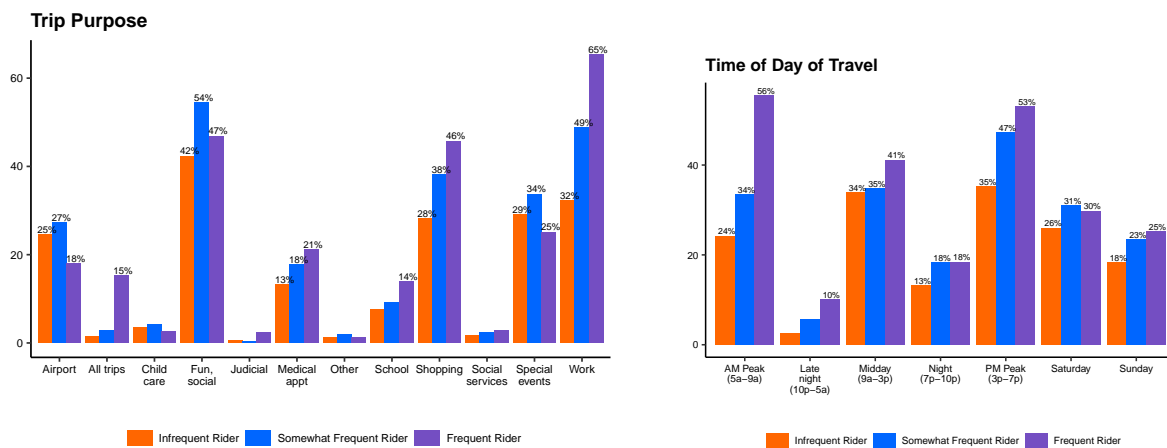


Figure 4: Trip Purpose and Time of Day of Travel, across Rider Status

Somewhat Frequent Riders: 3-10 transit trips per 30 days

Somewhat frequent riders took transit to social activities (55%), to get to work (49%), for shopping or errands (38%), and to get to special events (34%). These varied trip purposes were also reflected in varied travel times. The most popular time for travel was afternoon peak (47%). Approximately 30% of somewhat frequent riders indicated they traveled during the morning peak, midday, and on Saturday.

Among the riders in this group, 85% said that they were somewhat or very interested in using transit in the future. Frequently cited barriers to using transit included: transit is not available where people live or where they are going, it takes too long, or simply that there is not enough service. More direct, frequent service would encourage this group of riders to ride more.

Infrequent Riders: 1-2 transit trips per 30 days

Infrequent riders use transit for a variety of purposes at a variety of travel times (see below). A majority of infrequent riders report using transit to get to downtown Seattle.

Most infrequent riders (74%) were interested in using transit more in the future, but said that getting to where they need to go simply takes too long on transit. This is likely due to the fact that infrequent riders were more likely to live in suburban and semi-rural areas of the county, where access to transit is further from their homes. While the majority of frequent

and somewhat frequent riders live in Seattle/North King County, the majority of infrequent riders live in East and South King County.

Metro Riders' Experiences

Overall, riders reported high levels of satisfaction with many elements of their transit experiences. However, data pointed to opportunities for improvement.²

For Metro riders in King County, satisfaction with Metro overall and with Metro's bus service is high; approximately 70% of Metro riders reported being satisfied. Metro riders were also largely satisfied with elements of their on-board experience - such as the drivers' operation of the bus, comfort of the bus, seating availability on the bus, and fare payment with ORCA cards.

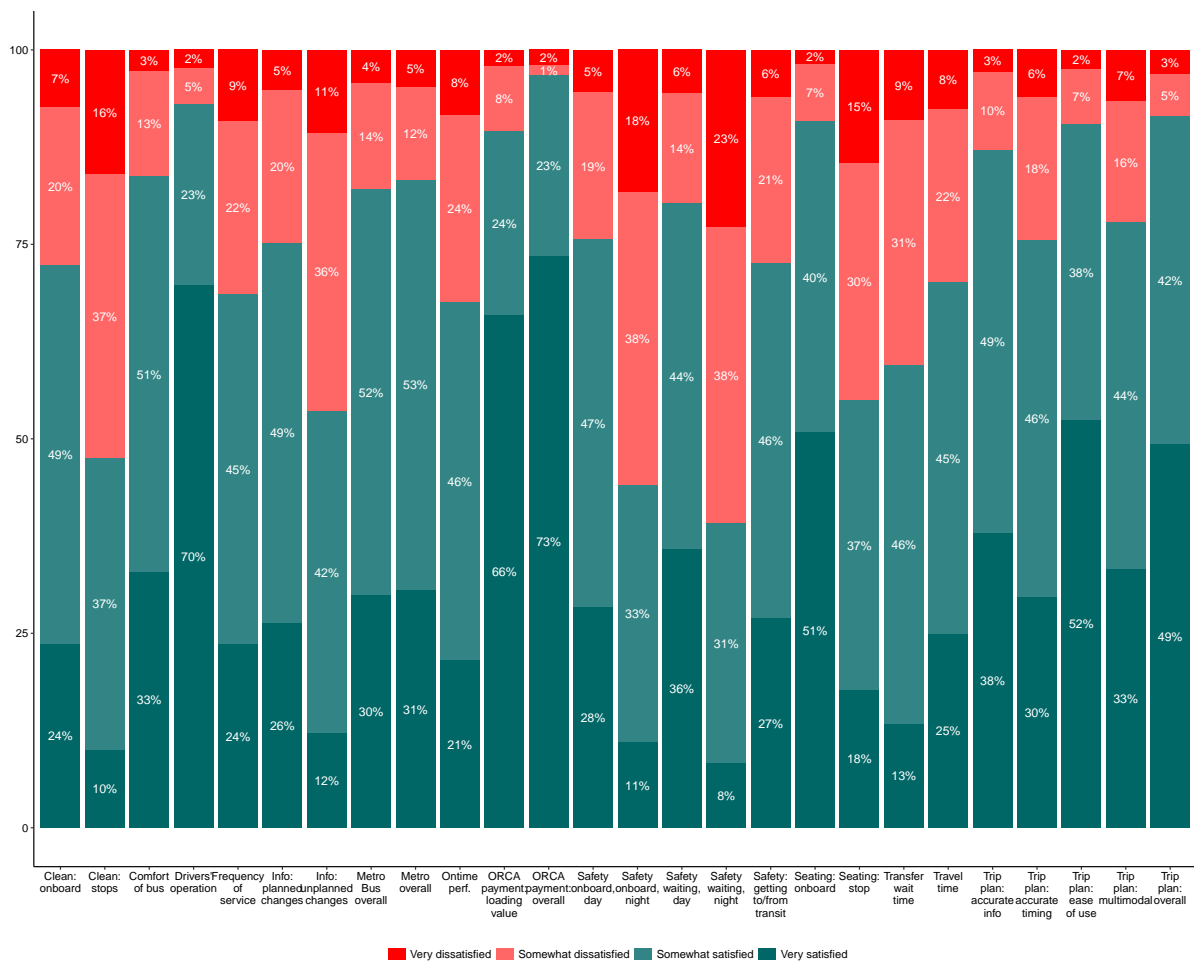


Figure 5: Satisfaction with Metro Bus Service Elements

Riders were the least satisfied with elements related to safety (particularly at night), cleanliness, and uncertainty related to travel time, such as on-time performance, wait time while transferring, the time it takes to travel, and about receiving information related to unplanned disruptions to service.

²Note that in other sections of this report, "riders" refers to any type of transit rider regardless of specific mode or transit agency. This section, however, is limited to only Metro bus riders and the scope of satisfaction questions are focused on Metro bus service elements.