

Memorandum

To: Caroline Wood, RSG Deputy Project Manager

From: Jay Kuvaas, Project Manager, SDK
Stephanie Devitt, Principal Consultant, SDK

Re: Project Summary, Travel Behavior Inventory

Date: March 13, 2024

In 2023, RSG contracted SDK Communications to lead the equity cohort of the Travel Behavior Inventory as part of the Met Council's Transportation Policy Plan. SDK's specific charge was to obtain between 300 and 450 survey responses from the under-represented African American, African Immigrant and LatinX communities of the Twin Cities metro area. SDK collaborated with a cohort of partner-organizations to achieve these numbers. Between our team's direct outreach and partner submissions, SDK secured 437 complete surveys.

Survey Design and Engagement Structure:

SDK worked with RSG to review the existing Travel Behavior Inventory and recommend improvements to both the survey design and how SDK would structure those agreements in order to enhance response rates. Key recommendations included:

1. **Survey Design: Consider Digital Equity.** SDK's study of digital inequities for Ramsey County and the City of St. Paul found that African American, African Immigrant and Latinx communities have incredibly high rates of connectivity barriers – from lack of cell phones and cell plans, to suppressed data and by-the-minute cell costs. This work taught us that we cannot expect communities of color to have the technology and plans necessary to complete the survey without significant financial cost well beyond incentives offered.
2. **Survey Design: Capture People In the Moment.** Our experience told us that asking people to follow up and take the survey on a second day would drop our response rate by at least 50%.
3. **Incentive Design: Allow Non-Financial Incentives.** SDK requested permission to supply partners with online, cell-capable devices and, in some instances, food, online access chargers and gift cards, rather than supplying partners only with cash. This approach made participation more attractive to many partners who would otherwise have to work through internal processes for technology purchases to get access to tablets for their programs. These devices enabled higher response rates and will provide ongoing help to the partner-organizations.
4. **Incentive Design: Gift Card Incentive Was Appropriate.** Survey respondents found the \$50 gift card to be a strong incentive to work through the long survey (average time: 40 minutes). That said, when some people started to fill out the behavior inventory for each member of their household, where the survey essentially has to be re-taken per person, they found that length of time far too great for the incentive offered and would walk away before completing the second person's travel stops.

Outreach Lessons: Relationships, Captive Locations Were Key Strategies.

SDK led the TBI outreach process through a combination of structured, paid partnerships with community-based organizations where we have a history of trust and partnership, and SDK staff-led events to collect surveys.

Community partners engaged to administer surveys were:

- Latino Chamber of Commerce
- St. Paul Promise Neighborhood
- The Lift Garage
- Greater Mount Vernon Missionary Baptist Church
- ACER, Inc.
- Urban Strategies, Inc. (Heritage Park Neighborhood, Highway 55 in North MPLS)

In addition, SDK leveraged a history of relationships with affordable housing developers and managers to hold lunch events where people took the survey at an apartment building's community room.

Key Lessons of the outreach process and partnerships included:

1. **Partnership Lessons: History of Collaboration.** All partners engaged had some experience with SDK's events or other engagements, and most had worked with our team directly on smaller projects in the past. The mutual familiarity and trust helped us identify potential partners who had the aptitude for the project, and facilitated open conversation needed to make the project a success.
2. **Partnership Lessons: Clear Expectations.** Before administering surveys began, SDK led one-on-one training sessions with each partner-organization, demonstrating how to navigate the different sections of the survey, to limit issues with respondents. These sessions also gave partners a clearer understanding of the time commitment needed to complete the survey, which partners then communicated to respondents, which led to more survey completions.
3. **Outreach Lessons: Tablets.** Providing tablets with the survey pre-loaded on its home page allowed partners to easily administer the survey. Over the course of the project, SDK worked with partners to troubleshoot issues with tablets and connectivity; in multiple instances, partners needed to use their phones as hotspots when administering surveys in areas without wi-fi. The hotspot use quickly drained phone batteries, though; this was resolved by purchasing plug-in phone battery extenders for partners to complete the sessions.
4. **Outreach Lessons: Captive Events.** Partners found their best success when administering surveys at captive events. Health fairs, where participants were required to sit after receiving COVID shots, were successful, and one partner administered most of their surveys in their lobby to waiting customers. Well-attended captive events were also created by supplying lunch for respondents at some sessions.

Key Themes:

Participants illuminated in detail the role transportation plays in the lives of low-income area BIPOC residents. The findings below summarize key themes:

- **The trade-offs of transportation.** Respondents are forced to make choices that cost them time or income to get to jobs or purchase basic necessities. Conversations revealed a consistent theme: taking transit takes a significant amount of time for many, and the opportunity costs of using cars or ride shares to get to and from jobs, grocery stores, and more are equally significant.
 - One respondent lives in Plymouth and takes an Uber to and from work at the mall in Minnetonka, at an average cost of \$13 per trip, six days a week. (\$156/wk.)
 - Another lives in Minneapolis and works in Fridley, and his average bus trip is 1 hour and 30 minutes each way.
 - Partners reported respondents in some cases spending close to \$750 a month on a car payment, and another reported the inability to find a reliable car for less than \$15,000.
 - A respondent reported taking a bus ride to Roseville from North Minneapolis to shop safely for groceries, with a reported trip time of 70 minutes each way, with hours spent at the store waiting for the return bus to arrive.
- **Public Transit is not suitable for family travel.** Many respondents spoke of the need for a car to bring children to their schools and other activities, all of which would be impossible using transit. The slower pace of transit and the need to keep kids entertained while they waited for buses or trains were reasons given for not using transit with their children. Others shared concern for keeping children safe on transit or navigating buses and trains with gear kids need (diaper bags, strollers, etc.).
 - One partner related a story of a mother who regularly drove four children to different locations spread across St. Paul- daycares, schools, activities- and by the time she finished dropping the last child off, it was time to return to pick up the first.
 - A mother talked about placing her youngest daughter in a daycare a 20-minute drive away because that facility would accept the daycare support she receives from the county, but this means her other child needs to take the city bus home, as she is unable to pick up both.
- **Safety of transit is of great concern.** In some cases, while it may be quicker to take the train to work or school, respondents instead chose ride shares, or to borrow cars from friends to get to their destination. Trains in particular have a poor reputation for safety, with some female respondents expressing unwillingness to use them alone.
 - One respondent mentioned that while public transit provided a faster trip to her jobs at the Mall of America and the airport, the known dangers of the bus system led her to take Uber instead.
 - Another respondent has a daughter in 6th grade that takes Metro Transit home from school every afternoon. Concerns over her daughter's safety on public transit led the respondent to purchase her daughter an iPhone, which would give her the ability to contact or track her daughter while riding the bus.
- **Respondents rely on unreliable cars to create income.** The majority of working respondents drove their personal vehicle to their jobs, with a smaller portion driving a personal vehicle specifically for work. The average age of respondent vehicles was 11 years old, putting respondents' income at risk if their cars broke down.
 - One respondent spoke of working as an Uber driver, where he would bring a fare to St. Paul from Minneapolis, and then be stuck there for hours waiting for his next fare. The sitting and waiting was a common occurrence for him.

- Multiple respondents reported their regular routines halting for days, missing work or appointments, if their cars were in the shop for repairs.
- **Disabilities severely limit travel.** The lack of self-mobility leads to a steep reduction in the trips people are willing to make. The difficulties of navigating transit compounds those issues for respondents, with many reporting rarely leaving their homes, if at all, in the average week.
 - One respondent, a deaf woman, reported not knowing either her home or work addresses but knew where to get on and off the bus. She said she did not travel anywhere else.
 - Another woman who used a wheelchair responded that she travelled minimally to avoid the struggle of getting on and off the bus and lengthy wait times.
- **Trip Stacking.** Respondents spoke often about fulfilling multiple needs while leaving the house. Whether out of an attempt to save money on gas, or demands from work and children, respondents are trying to make the most of their trips, often assisting friends or neighbors with their errands as well.
 - One respondent told of bringing her son, who was being tested for autism, to a specialty center that required her to make multiple bus transfers. She then had to get groceries, then had to pick up her daughter from daycare because the school bus wasn't working that day, all in one prolonged trip.
 - Many respondents who owned cars spoke of a willingness to use their cars as a community resource, doubling up trips to help friends, neighbors or extended family get to the store, school, or work.

Conclusions:

Survey respondents overall were excited to share their experiences and were optimistic that changes may result from telling their stories. From issues of safety and length of trips on public transportation, to the lack of affordability and reliability of cars, to the numerous reasons people choose not to travel, the TBI Equity Cohort offered respondents a chance to show the role transportation plays in the struggles low-income Twin Cities residents face on a daily basis and provides information that can assist Met Council in addressing those issues.