

Annual Count & Survey of San José Trails



PARKS, RECREATION & NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES



Trail Count 2019

Trail Count is an annual count and survey conducted along San José Trails. The volunteer-supported effort accomplishes four goals;

- 1) document the volume of trail usage with per day and annual figures
- 2) improve trail development (planning and design)
- 3) improve operations (maintenance and event coordination)
- 4) improve capability to obtain grant funding

This regular effort to collect data can help prioritize projects, shape policy or change the approach to design. Two years ago, staff reviewed a decade of data as the network grew by about 25 miles.

- Gap closure projects have a significant impact (86% increase with completion Guadalupe River Trail's Airport Parkway Under-Crossing).
- Build trails and they will come (422% more trail users along Guadalupe River Trail as the system was paved and extended).
- Highly-used trails may encourage more women to use trails (the percentage of women using trails increased from 25% to 44%).
- More trails mean more fun (46% reported fun as a primary motivator in 2007, this climbed to 70% in 2015).

Trail Count was initiated in 2007 to document the impact of trail closures due to downtown's frequent and large-scale special events. City staff, partnering with the Guadalupe River Park Conservancy and Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition, were seeking to show that frequent closures were disruptive to a larger number of trail users and could discourage greater usage of trail systems. The data supported engagement with the City Council's Transportation and Environment Committee (T&E) to refine and promote a Trail Closure Process to limit future closures, require early coordination to limit impacts to users, and establish protocols for early public notification of unavoidable closures. The process

discouraged closures, and required advance notification and coordination with Trail Program staff to minimize impacts to the greatest extent possible. Staff continues to work carefully with the Special Events Permit Unit, Valley Water and contractors to coordinate detours and closures early and to minimize impacts to the trail user. In 2019, Valley Water conducted seasonal maintenance of the Guadalupe River Trail system, with no closures and no complaints received by the City or Valley Water staff.





The Trail Program has been substantially funded by external grant sources (\$40,000,000 in grants with \$26,000,000 in City funding since 2003). Many grant programs require documentation of project outcomes. Grant programs administered by the Bay Area Quality Management District and the VTA's upcoming Measure B Program require before and after data only available through efforts like Trail Count.

Data Collection Method

Volunteers used the following tools:

- Count Sheet: The count sheet records usage in 15-minute increments. The sheet provides space to identify pedestrians, bicyclists and other users (equestrian, electric scooters, etc.). Volunteers are asked to record unusual conditions (special event traffic, large groups such a high school track runners, etc.). Count sheets use graphics to reinforce and clarify the definition of bicyclists (unicycles included) and pedestrians (wheelchairs and Segways included, as defined by California State Law).
- Survey Card: A small business card provides the website address and QR code leading to the survey. For the second year, the card was much smaller than postcards used in past years. The smaller size reduced expenses and provided an easy to carry reminder. The card stated the survey deadline as Sunday, September 15.



- Instructions: Guidance is provided via email to all volunteers providing instruction on how to complete and return the data. Options included email, text message and in-person delivery. For 2019, all count sheets were photographed and sent via text message to the Division Manager. All count sheets were gathered and documented by Wednesday, September 18.
- **Support:** The Division Manager, Senior Analyst and Volunteer Program Manager visited all sites throughout the day to respond to questions, and encourage and thank the volunteers.



Date Selection and Count Periods

San José Trail Program staff have consistently conducted counts in mid-September as recommended by the <u>National Pedestrian and Bicycle</u> <u>Documentation project</u> (NPBD). This time of year is desirable for counts because:

- 1. School is in session.
- 2. Weather is mild with rain unlikely.
- 3. Daylight hours extend past 6:00 p.m.
- 4. Several State grants are due in the fall making data collection timely.

The NPBD recommends a one-day count and suggests it occur between September 9 and 15. San José's Trail Count 2019 occurred on Wednesday, September 11. San José's Trail Count has occurred on Wednesdays in September since initiation in 2007.

Seven count stations gathered data.

- Five stations were monitored for a 12-hour count period; from 7:00 am to 7:00 pm. This 12-hour period is recommended by the NPBD.
- Two count stations: Los Gatos Creek Trail-Auzerais Avenue and Three Creeks Trail-Willow Street were staffed during morning peak hours (7:00 am to 9:00 am) and evening peak hours (4:00 pm to 7:00 pm) due to limited resources and anticipated low volumes (below 200).

Count Stations

Ideally, the City would establish count stations across the entire Trail Network but limited staff time, volunteers and resources focus data collection on a limited number of sites. Staff has sustained three count stations along the Guadalupe River Trail for over a decade. The trail system is one of the largest systems in the network, extends from downtown through Silicon Valley, and is defined as a Core Trail in the Network (ie. a primary, long-distance route that extends past varied land uses). Over time, staff has added count stations. In 2009, stations along Los Gatos Creek Trail were added and additional permanent or short-term stations have been added since 2010 (a total of 15 stations).

The strategy for adding permanent or short-term stations has been:

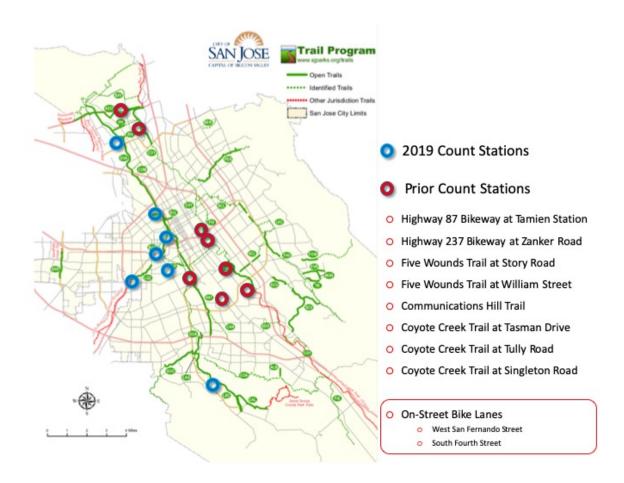
- Document popular regional systems (Guadalupe River, Los Gatos Creek, Coyote Creek and Los Alamitos Creek Trail)
- Document the value and impact of upcoming trail extensions (Los Gatos Creek Trail at Auzerais

Sustaining stations for over a decade has created a robust data set that offers PRNS planners unique insights and guidance for improving projects and has made San José well-recognized as a resource for pedestrian & bike data. Over the past years, the Trail Count data set has been shared with agencies to support research:

- University of Texas Dallas
- Rails to Trails Conservancy
- Metropolitan Transportation Commission

- Avenue and Three Creeks Trail).
- Obtain data needed to submit compelling grant applications to fund design and construction of projects.
- Support community groups that wish to advocate for trail development or operational changes (Five Wounds Trail and Communications Hill Trail)

Trail Network map with current and prior count station locations.



The seven stations established for Trail Count 2019 are:

- 1. Guadalupe River Trail at Coleman Avenue: Volunteers conducted a 12-hour count at this station. The station is several hundred feet north of the Guadalupe River Park Conservancy's Visitor's Center, along the lower main trail through the Guadalupe River Park & Gardens.
 - Since 2015, the station serves between 900 and 1,000 persons daily. Volume is **down by less than 1%** from 2018.
- 2. **Guadalupe River Trail at Riverpark Towers:** Volunteers conducted a 12-hour count at this station. This station was established in 2017 along the Riverpark Towers plaza. The station is centrally located in Downtown. It replaced a

station at nearby Park Avenue which was retired after a decade of use because of multiple access points that complicated the count process. The Riverpark Towers station supports more accurate counts with a single trail alignment.

In 2017, volunteers were counting persons on the trail and nearby pedestrian bridge that spans the river. The bridge may support trail usage, but is also serving persons walking to and from the nearby office towers. For Trail Count 2019, guidance was provided to only count persons on the trail, directly in front of the station. **Volume is down by 38%** which is attributed to the more precise trail-specific count.

- 3. Guadalupe River Trail at River Oaks Parkway: Volunteers conducted a 12-hour count at this station. This station is consistently reports the highest volumes. Persons are counted traveling along the east bank trail and the perpendicular River Oaks Parkway bridge that links the Rivermark Neighborhood to North First Street Light Rail and bus service. Volume is slightly higher by 2.1% from last year.
- 4. Los Gatos Creek at Auzerais Avenue: Volunteers conducted morning and evening peak hour counts at this station. This reach of the regional trail system is currently disconnected from the larger system. The trail links Willow Glen (via Lonus Street, near Lincoln Avenue) to Midtown, a neighborhood to the west of Downtown. Del Monte Park borders a portion of the trail to the west and offers a public restroom, dog park, play fields and soccer fields. This station continues to be managed in order to document the impact of a future bridge connection to Three Creeks Trail and extension of Los Gatos Creek Trail northward to Park Avenue via an under-crossing at the Caltrain tracks. Volume is slightly down by 1.2% from last year.
- 5. Los Gatos Creek at Hamilton Avenue: Volunteers conducted a 12-hour count at this station. The regional trail system extends nine miles from Meridian Avenue in San José, through Campbell and Los Gatos, and ends at the Lexington Reservoir Dam. Los Gatos Creek is recognized as one of Silicon Valley's most popular trails. The trail is adjacent to employment (eBay), housing, retail (The Pruneyard) and park/open space. Volume is significantly higher by 12.6% from last year. No notes about large groups or unusual circumstances were recorded to explain this rise in use.
- 6. Los Alamitos Creek near Camden Avenue: Volunteers conducted a 12-hour count at this station. The six-mile trail system links to Lake Almaden, Calero Creek and Guadalupe River trails. The trail system travels through and along open space bounded by low-density residential development. Volume is slightly higher by 0.1% from last year.

7. Three Creeks Trail at Willow Street: Volunteers conducted morning and evening peak hour counts at this station. The 0.8-mile landscaped trail was completed in August 2018, with a station in place for Trail Count 2018. A 12-hour count was conducted in that first year of operation and led to an error in the initial findings reported (12-hours of data compared to this year's AM & PM counts). Comparing the count data to the corresponding AM & PM data from 2018 indicates a 6.1% increase from last year attributed to the growing awareness of the trail system.

Station	Total (2018)	Total (2019)	Change	Count type
Guadalupe at Coleman Av	889	886	<0.3%>	12-hour
Guadalupe at Riverpark Towers	892	568	<36.3%>	12-hour
Guadalupe at River Oaks	2424	2474	2.1%	12-hour
Los Alamitos at Camden	860	881	0.1%	12-hour
Los Gatos at Hamilton Av	1072	1207	12.6%	12-hour
Los Gatos at Auzerais Av	173	171	<1.2%>	AM/PM
Three Creeks at Willow St	115	122	6.1%	AM/PM

Conditions

In 2019, the weather was warm and about 10 degrees warmer than in 2018. Temperatures ranged from the low 60's in the early morning and reached the low

80's by early afternoon.
Temperatures were recorded at 8:30 am, 2:15 and 6:00 pm. The count day began with foggy skies that quickly cleared by 8:00 am and remained clear all day. The weather was not viewed as a barrier to trail usage.

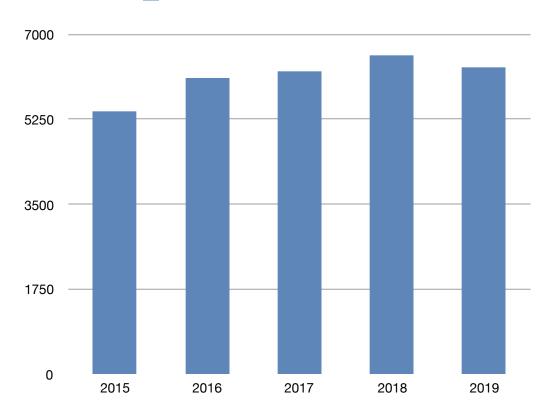


Warmer temperatures may have a discouraging influence on recreational users. This was not the case on September 11 as usage of the Los Alamitos Creek Trail was unchanged from last year. This south San José Trail system is predominantly used for recreation per the survey findings.

Findings

Over 6,300 trail users were counted at the seven count stations this year. This is 250 fewer than 2018. There were no external factors like closures, new sections of trails, or special events that would have negatively or positively impacted the counts on September 11. Usage of the trail system is tending towards 6,000 users across the seven count stations.

Cumulative Count from all Stations

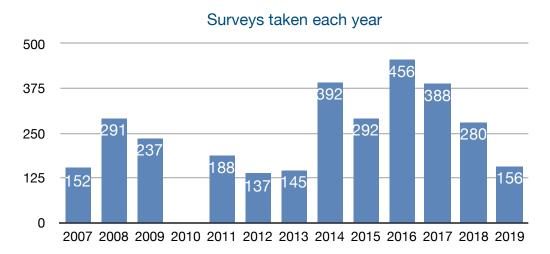


It's typical to see variations in the count. A change of +/-1% to 2% was found at four long-term count stations which supports the methodology of data collection, as the results can be duplicated from year to year. The significant drop of 38.3% at Guadalupe River Trail - Rivermark Towers is attributed to a change in instruction which has volunteers only counting persons on the trail and not the nearby pedestrian bridge.

The online survey was open from September 11 to September 15 and obtained responses from 156 trail users. This was a large decrease from 2018, and reflected a general decline since the high of 456 in 2016. Persons were encouraged to take the survey with small cards offered at count stations and postings via Social Media (Twitter and Instagram). Information was conveyed to our partners and champions to further promote the survey (San José Department of Transportation, Guadalupe River Park Conservancy, Save Our Trails, Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition).

There were three factors that may explain the reduced number of surveys taken:

- The survey had opened on Trail Count day (Wednesday, September 11), in prior years, the survey was open and promoted earlier in the week, often by Monday morning.
- Promotion via social media (Twitter and Instagram@SanJoséTrails)
 commenced on Trail Count day, tied to availability of the survey. In prior years,
 earlier postings and encouragement messages were conveyed by Monday.
- Volunteers were encouraged to offer the card to interested parties, but not to stop and engage as was the practice in prior years. This occurred to ensure public safety and not block access to the trail.



The survey consisted of seventeen questions. As per prior years, the survey included questions regarding demographics, mode of travel, reason for trail use, and trail system(s) used. Similar to the 2018 survey, staff was seeking public input on the department's five guiding principles (Stewardship, Nature, Equity & Access, Identity and Public Life). The survey also asked about likes, dislikes and requested written feedback on those points.

The following table converts the data from 12-hour count stations to indicate the Annual Average Daily Traffic (based upon variations in use throughout the year) and the adjusted Annual Volume as derived from the Rails to Trails Conservancy's Trail Traffic Calculator.



COUNT STATION (high volume sites only)	Annual Avg Daily Traffic (AADT)*	ANNUAL VOLUME
Guadalupe at Coleman Avenue	928.92	339,056
Guadalupe at Riverpark Towers	568.55	207,521
Guadalupe at River Oaks Pkwy	2561.94	935,108
Los Alamitos at Camden Avenue	987.23	360,339
Los Gatos at Hamilton Avenue	1346.42	491,443



Survey Findings per Trail System

Survey data was sorted per trail systems. Data presented is for trail systems used by at least 10 survey respondents. The highest scores are noted with \rightleftharpoons and align to Department's five guiding principles per ActivateSJ, 20-year strategic plan.

COYOTE CREEK TRAIL

"The interface with nature on the Coyote Creek Trail south of Hellyer Avenue."

Primary Reason for Using Trail	Percentage	Responses
Health & Fitness	20%	2
Fun	20%	2
Active Transportation	40%	4
Other or Decline to State	2%	2

DEMOGRAPHICS: 90% Male / 10% Female

CONDITION: Report trail as Good or Great, 57%

IMPACTS:

- Pavement condition
- Under-crossing lights

OTHER CONCERNS (5 Respondents)

- Homelessness, 80% (4 / 5)
- 2 respondents had Below Average impression of San José Trails

ALIGNMENT:

Stewardship 6.3
Equity & Access 7.0
Public Life 7.0
Identity 8.0
Nature 9.0 \(\frac{1}{2} \)

GUADALUPE RIVER TRAIL

"Love that I can ride out to Alviso and the Bay"

Primary Reason for Using Trail	Percentage	Responses
Health & Fitness	36%	19
Fun	17%	9
Active Transportation	43% 🖕	23
Other or Decline to State	4%	2

DEMOGRAPHICS: 79% Male / 21% Female

CONDITION: Report trail as Good or Great, 75.5% 🚖



IMPACTS:

- Landscape maintenance
- Seasonal weed removal

OTHER CONCERNS:

- Homelessness, 52% (13 / 25)
- 1 respondents had Poor impression of San José Trails

ALIGNMENT:

Stewardship	6.9
Equity & Access	6.9
Public Life	6.2
Identity	7.0
Nature	8.3

LOS GATOS CREEK TRAIL

"Can get to Los Gatos and Campbell pretty easily on the Los Gatos Creek Trail. The trails encourage me to use my bike to get places I need to go."

Primary Reason for Using Trail	Percentage	Responses
Health & Fitness	50%	19
Fun	16%	6
Active Transportation	29%	11
Other or Decline to State	5%	2

DEMOGRAPHICS: 76% Male / 21% Female / 3% Decline to state

CONDITION: Report trail as Good or Great: 65.5%

IMPACTS:

- General maintenance
- Landscape maintenance
- Litter
- Pavement condition

OTHER CONCERNS:

- Homelessness, 37% (7 / 19)
- Distance from nearby trails; accessibility

ALIGNMENT:

Stewardship	7.4	
Equity & Access	6.8	
Public Life	6.3	
Identity	6.2	
Nature	7.6	

LOS ALAMITOS CREEK TRAIL

"The trail near Almaden Lake to Greystone is excellent. It is well maintained except for want of rest rooms. Couple of garbage cans through the trail will be good."

Primary Reason for Using Trail	Percentage	Responses
Health & Fitness	73% 🚖	16
Fun	23%🊖	5
Active Transportation	0%	0
Other or Decline to State	4%	1

DEMOGRAPHICS: 33% Male / 63% Female / 4% Decline to state

CONDITION: Report trail as Good or Great: 72.7%

IMPACTS:

- Maintenance
- Landscape maintenance
- Seasonal weed removal

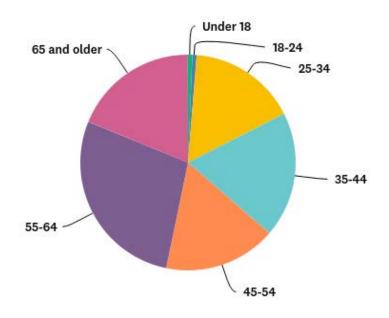
OTHER CONCERNS:

- Lack of trail striping
- Restrooms

ALIGNMENT:

Stewardship	7.4 🚖
Equity & Access	7.6 🚖
Public Life	7.5 🚖
Identity	9.9 🚖
Nature	8.3

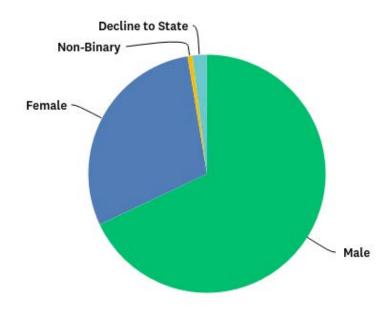
Q1. What is your age?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Under 18	0.65%	1
18-24	0.65%	1
25-34	16.23%	25
35-44	18.83%	29
45-54	16.88%	26
55-64	27.92%	43
65 and older	18.83%	29
TOTAL		154

31.78% were over 55 per Trail Count 2018 **46.75**% over 55 per Trail Count 2019

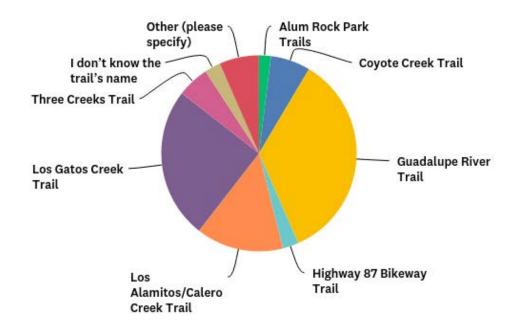
Q2. What is your gender?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Male	67.97%	104
Female	29.41%	45
Non-Binary	0.65%	1
Decline to State	1.96%	3
TOTAL		153

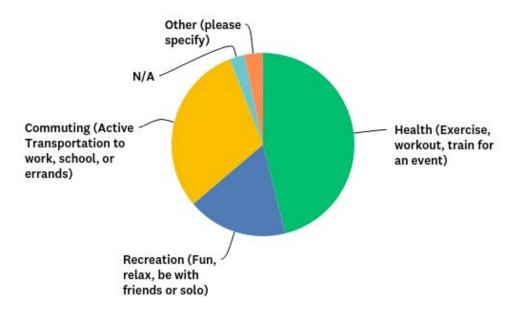
	2017	2018	2019
Male	54.61	70.00	67.97
Female	43.64	28.93	29.41
Non-Binary	0.78	0	0.65
Decline to State	0.78	1.07	1.96

Q3. Which San José Trail do you visit most often?



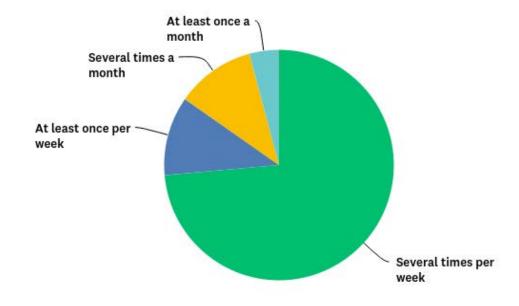
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Alum Rock Park Trails	1.97%	3
Coyote Creek Trail	6.58%	10
Guadalupe River Trail	34.87%	53
Highway 87 Bikeway Trail	2.63%	4
Los Alamitos/Calero Creek Trail	14.47%	22
Los Gatos Creek Trail	25.00%	38
Three Creeks Trail	5.26%	8
I don't know the trail's name	2.63%	4
Other (please specify)	6.58%	10
TOTAL		152

Q4. What is your primary reason for using the trail today?



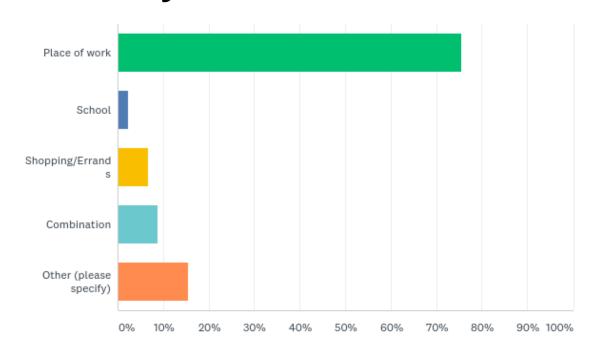
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONS	ES
Health (Exercise, workout, train for an event)	46.05%	70
Recreation (Fun, relax, be with friends or solo)	17.76%	27
Commuting (Active Transportation to work, school, or errands)	30.26%	46
N/A	2.63%	4
Other (please specify)	3.29%	5
TOTAL		152

Q5. If you selected Health, how often do you visit for exercise?



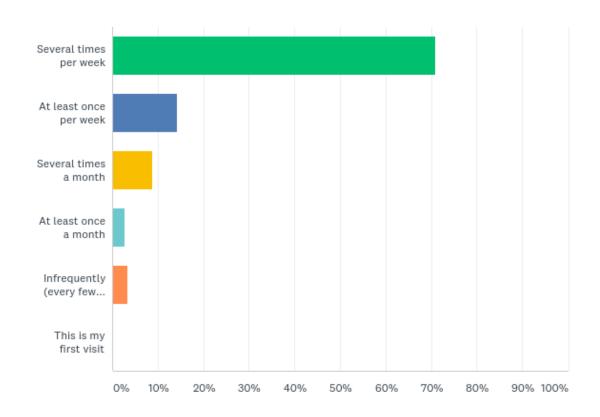
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Several times per week	73.61%	53
At least once per week	11.11%	8
Several times a month	11.11%	8
At least once a month	4.17%	3
Infrequently (every few months or less)	0.00%	0
This is my first visit	0.00%	0
TOTAL		72

Q6. If commuting, which best defines your destination?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Place of work	75.56%	34
School	2.22%	1
Shopping/Errands	6.67%	3
Combination	8.89%	4
Other (please specify)	15.56%	7
Total Respondents: 45		

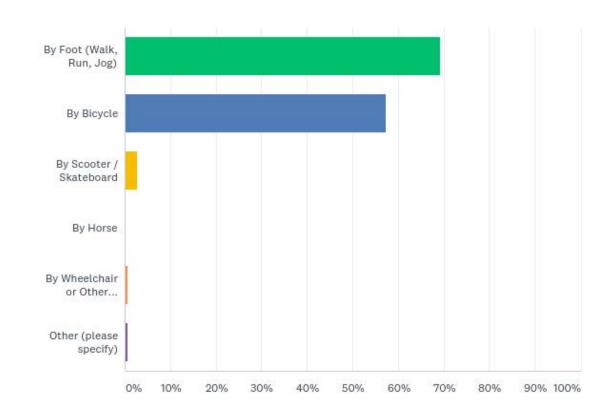
Q7. How often do you visit San José Trails?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Several times per week	70.95%	105
At least once per week	14.19%	21
Several times a month	8.78%	13
At least once a month	2.70%	4
Infrequently (every few months or less)	3.38%	5
This is my first visit	0.00%	0
TOTAL		148

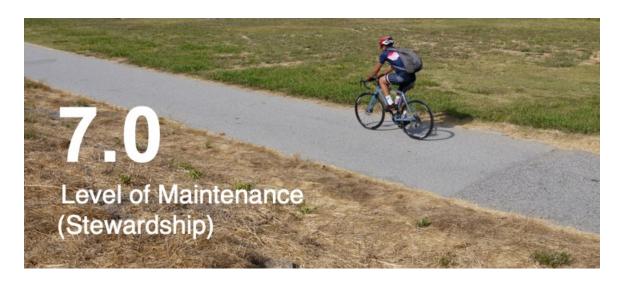
Visits per week are increasing: 81% were visiting at least once per week in 2018, now 86% are visiting at least once per week.

Q8. How do you use the trail?

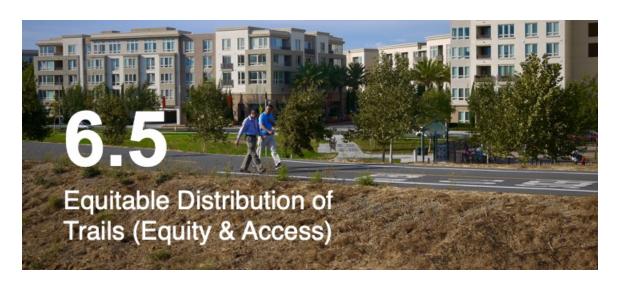


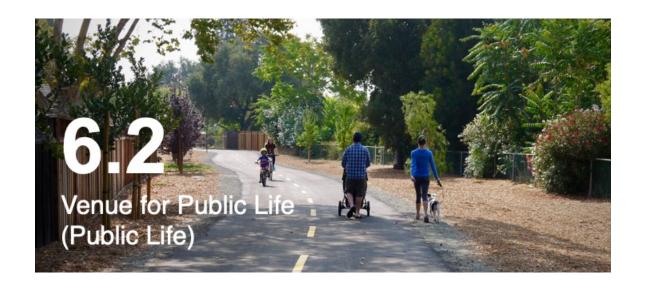
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
By Foot (Walk, Run, Jog)	69.33%	104
By Bicycle	57.33%	86
By Scooter / Skateboard	2.67%	4
By Horse	0.00%	0
By Wheelchair or Other Mobility Assistance	0.67%	1
Other (please specify)	0.67%	1
Total Respondents: 150		

Q9. On a Scale of 1:10, rate the following (Guiding Principles):



Trail Count 2018 = 6.7

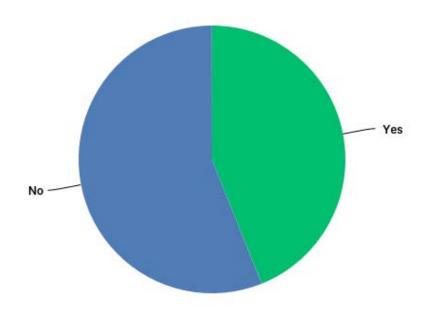








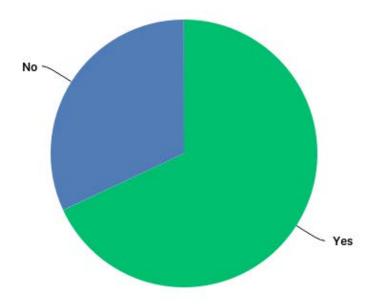
Q10: Are you aware that San José has developed over 61 miles of the planned 100-mile urban trail network?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	43.92%	65
No	56.08%	83
TOTAL		148



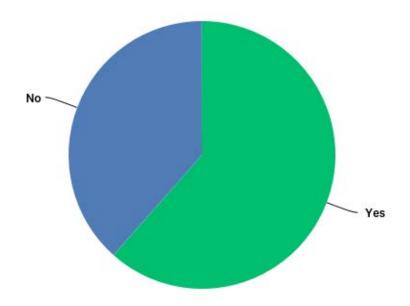
Q11: Do you think that San José and Bay Area Trails would benefit from a tourism campaign?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	68.06%	98
No	31.94%	46
TOTAL		144



Q12: Would an App encourage more use of San José Trails?

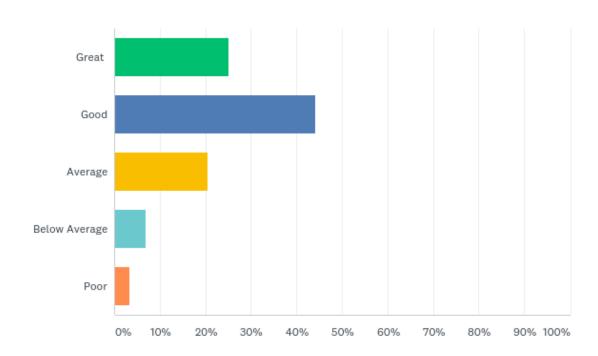


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	61.54%	88
No	38.46%	55
TOTAL		143



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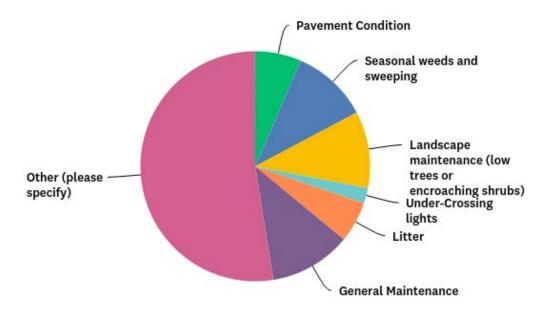
Q13: What is your impression of San José Trails?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Great	25.17%	37
Good	44.22%	65
Average	20.41%	30
Below Average	6.80%	10
Poor	3.40%	5
TOTAL		147



Q14: What most negatively impacts your ability to bike along trails?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Pavement Condition	6.47%	9
Seasonal weeds and sweeping	10.79%	15
Landscape maintenance (low trees or encroaching shrubs)	10.79%	15
Under-Crossing lights	2.16%	3
Litter	5.76%	8
General Maintenance	11.51%	16
Other (please specify)	52.52%	73
TOTAL		139

This question offered six pre-selected responses and an opportunity to state other impacts.

Maintenance

- 20% of respondents said that Landscape Maintenance and Weeds were an impediment to usage.
- 17% selected Litter and need for General Maintenance

• 52% selected "Other". Of the responses, responses were focused on:

Social Issues

- Unhoused persons occupying the trail.
- Unhoused persons placing obstacles on the trail.
- The behavior of unhoused persons (yelling and harassing).

Design Improvements

- Need for wayfinding.
- Trail connections and completion of the network.

Operational Improvements

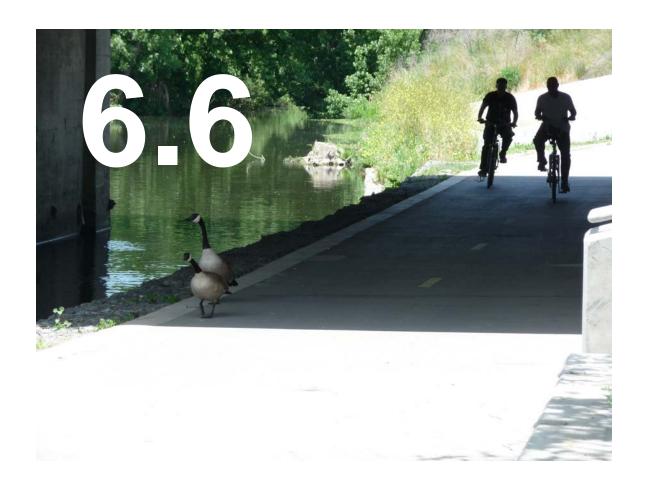
- Lack of advance notice/data regarding closures.
- Flooded under-crossings, more winter maintenance.
- Lack of speed enforcement.
- Striping and signage.
- · Lack of restrooms.
- Lack of information about trails.

User Conflicts

- High speed e-bikes and e-scooters.
- Courtesy between bicyclists and pedestrians.



Q15: On a scale of 1:10, with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest, how would you rate your feeling of safety along San José Trails?



Question 16: What do you like best about San José Trails?

Stewardship

- Clean.
- Well-maintained.

Equity & Access

- Along habitat and parks.
- Many trails.
- Covers lots of areas.
- Distributed across the city.
- Wide network allows travel to lots of places.
- Near work site.
- · Close to home.
- No cars.
- Safe alternative to on-street bike commuting.
- Grade separated crossings (bridges and under-crossings).
- "Minimum contact with traffic/ very long, continuous trails without stoplights/ intersections."

Public Life

- Lots of people.
- Place to unwind.
- Walk my dog.
- Push baby stroller.

Nature

- Scenic, next to water.
- Beautiful places to explore.
- Natural spaces.
- Being able to ride though the rural areas traffic free. Wildlife along the paths.

Identity

- Home town pride.
- Family friendly.
- The overall network is incredible, getting better every day.
- So many trails to bike and hike.
- I appreciate how many trails there are in the South Bay.

Question 17: What do you like least about San José Trails?

Stewardship

- · Lack of maintenance
- Trash, glass on trails
- Flooded under crossings
- Litter in the river
- Trail users are the forgotten commuters; lack of winter maintenance

Equity & Access

- Lack of continuity
- Electric bikes and scooters are too fast and too common now. Laws are not enforced. Dangerous for walking infants.
- Lack of speed enforcement; e-bikes exceed 15 mph.
- Too many people at times; "people walking three abreast, difficult to pass."
- Hours of operation ("closed" after dark)

Public Life

- "Homeless taking over and the police allowing it."
- They're kind of crappy looking, feel unsafe, a relatively recent development."
- "Lately the encroachment of the homeless, especially along highway 87 trail."
- "Crowding, aggressive bicyclists."
- "I don't feel safe on all of the trails, so I don't use them. That's disappointing."
- Mental state of the unhoused.
- Aggressive unhoused individuals, lack of police and rangers.

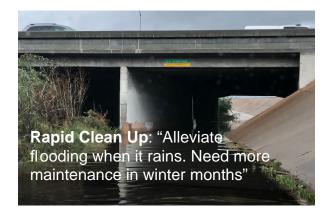
Nature

- The lack of maintenance of the landscape is taking away from its beauty.
- The unhoused individuals beat down nature.

Identity

- "Not enough trails"
- "Gaps that prevent a pretty good system, prevent it from being world class."
- "How the city treats them is a joke because they only care about drivers."

RECOMMENDATIONS



















47 volunteers (94 hours)7 count stations156 online surveys taken

Save Our Trails
Guadalupe River Park Conservancy
Mark Thomas Company
GHD Company
VTA
Callander Associates