



TRAIL COUNT 2009

Summary Report



 **Trail Program**
www.sjparks.org/trails

In partnership with:



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Executive Summary

Trail Count is an annual count and survey of San Jose's off-street bicycle and pedestrian trail users. This event gathers valuable data that supports improved planning, design and grant-writing efforts. Trail Count 2009 was conducted on Wednesday, September 23, 2009.

The key findings of this year's Trail Count event are as follows:

Overall increase in trail usage

(+9.6%): The overall number of trail users in 2009 was 9.6% higher than in 2008, when comparing the same count stations and hours.

Trails as transportation: 53%

of survey respondents reported that they were primarily using the trail to commute or run errands. The remainder of responses indicated primarily recreation-oriented usage.

Substantial increase at the busiest count station

(+23.7%): Guadalupe River Trail at Coleman Avenue saw a 23.7% increase in usage this year;. This was by far the largest numerical increase—531 trail users vs. 429 (2008 count)—and the busiest count station of the event.

Increased per-person trail usage: 68%

reported that their use of the San Jose trail network has increased "significantly" (39.9%) or "a little" (28.1%) in the past two years. In addition, round-trips of 10+ miles on the trails more than doubled, from 21.7% of responses in 2008 to 46.7% this year.



Safety on the trail network:

99.4% reported feeling "very safe" (68.3%) or "somewhat safe" (31.3%) on the trails. One individual respondent reported feeling unsafe along the trails.

The results of Trail Count 2009 are explored in greater detail as part of this report.

Background

Purpose

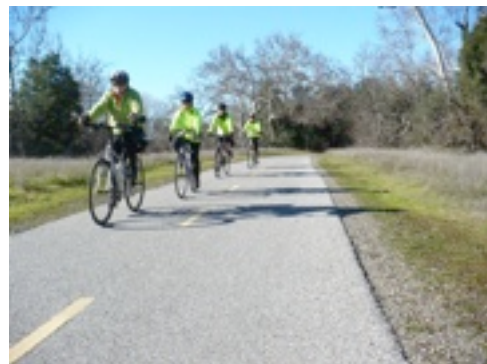
Trail Count was initiated in 2007, primarily to address the lack of specific data regarding the number of trail users affected by trail closures due to special events in Downtown San Jose. A formal Trail Closure Policy was instituted due to the documented number of impacted trail users. Since then, Trail Count's objectives have expanded to, in general, quantify the number of daily trail users making use of the entire trail network, how the individual trail systems are being used (e.g., recreational trail use or transportation), user perceptions, and year-to-year changes in trail usage. For example, Trail Count 2008 counted an average of 420 people on the Guadalupe River Trail (Coleman Avenue count station) on two weekdays, with 61.4% commuting to work or running errands. This number of trail users was an 86% increase over the previous year, likely attributable to a nearby gap closure (Airport Parkway Under-Crossing).

The survey component of Trail Count is used to gather feedback and suggestions from trail users regarding potential future improvements to the trail network. The numerical data and other input from Trail Count, and the initiative to count trail users, were quite meaningful to grant agencies over the past 12 months. *Trail Count 2008* data is credited as a major determining factor in the City's Trail Program receiving over \$1,377,000 in grant funding in Fiscal year 2008-09. Fact Sheets about the 2007 and 2008 Trail Count events are posted on the Trail Program's web site, under "Reports": www.sjparks.org/Trails/TrailsReports.asp and are shared with agencies around the country that seek to conduct similar efforts.

As planning commenced for this year's event, there was some doubt regarding the outcome. Usage might increase because of seemingly higher levels of attention being paid to the potential benefits of walking and bicycling (e.g., better physical fitness, reduced greenhouse gas emissions) in local and national media. Improvements to trail connectivity along the Guadalupe River Trail in 2007-2008 were also seen as a factor that might lead to a higher number of trail users to visit the trails. On the other hand, gasoline prices had decreased significantly from mid-2008 levels, possibly making automobile travel more attractive to some potential trail users. (Trail-related stories in print and television media are posted on the Trail Program's website, under "In the News.")

As with previous years, Trail Count 2009 was conducted specifically to secure data for four primary objectives:

1. Improve design of new trails by understanding trail user needs and demographics.
2. Ascertain daily usage volume to demonstrate to the City Council an on-



going funding need for development and maintenance of the trail network. This goal has taken on increased importance in light of the San Jose City Council's adoption of the Green Vision sustainability policy in October 2007. Goal #10 of the Green Vision is to expand the City's existing trail network to 100 miles by 2022 (53 miles are currently open). <http://www.sanjoseca.gov/greenvision>

3. Serve as an important tool in communicating to local, State and Federal grant agencies that San Jose's trails offer a well-used recreational and commuting amenity that requires on-going financial support.
4. Demonstrate that the trail network is a viable off-street commute option for many Silicon Valley workers and should be integrated into the overall transportation system.

Secondary objectives result from trail users accessing the program's website in order to complete an on-line survey.

1. Input supports development of a detailed list of current maintenance and safety issues that can be assigned to appropriate staff for resolution. A "comments" fields provides the opportunity for detailed input and commentary.
2. Survey respondents are exposed to the website's resources for discovering one of the City's existing 24 trail systems. A "Trail Network Overview" document, as well as detailed maps for all systems, help trail users understand all their recreational and commute options within San Jose.

Seeking trail usage data is consistent with the Trail Program's vision of becoming the national leader in trail development for recreation and commuting. Data collection provides staff with the information necessary to make better planning, design and operational decisions. Trail Count data also helps staff to advocate for grant funding, maintenance funds and propose priority projects for the City Council's consideration as part of the annual budget process.



Benefits

Past Trail Count data has supported the successful pursuit of grant funds including:

- \$700,000 from the State of California for construction of the Guadalupe River Trail located between Woz Way and Virginia Street.
- \$150,000 grant from the Bay Area Ridge Trail for the Penitencia Creek Trail.
- \$123,000 from the State for Guadalupe River Trail enhancements.

Trail Count 2008 data was used to support a \$1.37M grant for development of the Lower Guadalupe River Trail from Highway 880 to Gold Street. Representatives from the State of California Natural Resources Agency (grant administration agency) lauded the City of San Jose for its data collection approach, stating that all agencies should be conducting similar research.

Partnership

The annual Trail Count event relies heavily on volunteers from the community to staff the count stations on the trails. Many community members generously gave of their time to make this year's event a success.

- Trail Program staff from the City of San Jose's Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services carried out the primary preparation, volunteer recruitment, and logistical coordination for this year's event.
- The Friends of the Guadalupe River Park & Gardens (non-profit park advocacy organization) hosted a count station and all of the volunteer recruitment and coordination services for Trail Count's busiest single location (Guadalupe River Trail near Coleman Avenue).
- Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition assisted with outreach to its many members for volunteers to participate in the count.

On the day of Trail Count 2009 (Wednesday, September 23), the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) also conducted its annual count of trail users along the Lower Guadalupe River Trail, at River Oaks Parkway near the VTA campus at 3331 North First Street and nearby North First Street Light Rail Station. Data collected by the VTA as part of the independent effort is presented on the program's web site, under "Reports", "Trail Count 2009."

Analysis

Planning Process

This year's count was held on Wednesday, September 23. San Jose has over 300 days of sunshine annually, so securing good trail-use data can occur at almost any time of the year. The month of September was selected because:

1. School is in session
2. Weather is mild with rain unlikely
3. Daylight hours extend past 6:00 pm
4. A number of grant applications are due late in the year for which current data can contribute to a competitive submittal



The two previous City of San Jose Trail Counts (2007 and 2008) were multiple-day events. Trail Count 2008 spanned over two Wednesdays and one Saturday: 9/17, 9/20, and 9/24. Because of limited City staff resources this year, a decision was made to carry out a one-day count. A one-day count was considered acceptable because of the existing Trail Count data from 2007 and 2008 to use as a baseline of comparison for this year's results. The National Bicycle and Pedestrian Documentation Project also supported a one day effort, with counts during morning and afternoon peak periods. The national documentation effort is co-sponsored by Alta Planning and Design and the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE)

Pedestrian and Bicycle Council: <http://bikepeddocumentation.org/> The national project recommended dates in early- to mid- September.

Seven count stations were established in this year's Trail Count event (An additional station at Lower Guadalupe River and River Oaks Parkway was established by the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA). The VTA's data collection methodology differed somewhat from Trail Count 2009. The VTA data is described and presented on the program's website, under "reports", "Trail Count 2009").

Five of the stations were the same locations as were used in 2008:

1. Guadalupe River Trail at Coleman Ave
2. Guadalupe River Trail at Park Ave
3. Highway 87 Bikeway at Tamien Station
4. Los Gatos Creek at Auzerais Ave
5. Los Gatos Creek at Hamilton Ave

The two new additional count stations this year were:

6. Coyote Creek Trail at Tully Rd
7. Highway 237 Bikeway

Increasing the number of count stations was desired in order to better understand usage over the overall trail network. The modest increase in stations was cognizant that planning and conducting the event would be dependent largely on volunteers and staff person's capacity to find time within their existing workloads. With past counts, the final week prior to the event required that outreach be intensified and several City staff were asked to fill gaps in the schedule when volunteering fell short. It was considered important to increase the count sites in a conservative manner in order to ensure full staffing of each station.

Examining trail usage throughout the day is highly desirable. However, the City and its partner agencies determined that available resources required limited but focused counts. The strategy that was used to expand the number of stations but minimize demand on volunteers was to: 1) Reduce the number of count days from three to one, as described earlier in this section, and 2) Cut most of the count stations back to a "peak-hour" (7:00-9:00 AM and 4:00-6:00 PM) count periods. The intention of this counting method is to quantify the level of traffic volume during the typical morning and evening commute periods. A peak-hour count is consistent with the recommendations of the National Bicycle and Pedestrian Documentation Project (The National Project's standard recommended counting interval for weekdays is 5:00-7:00 PM. However, their recommendations state that "if you have been doing counts using [previously established] time periods, please keep using these same time



periods for all future counts in order to be consistent.” The City of San Jose has previously used 4:00 to 6:00 PM as its peak hour.) The National Project has also established formulas for reliably extrapolating peak-hour counts to an estimation of the number of all-day trail users.

Because of the full day counts occurring in 2007 and 2008, a decision was made to maintain one 12-hour count station for comparative purposes. The Guadalupe River Trail at Coleman Avenue was in close proximity to the headquarter building of the Friends of the Guadalupe River and the route was known to be a popular and well used route. Past counts documented that it was by far the busiest weekday count locations in the San Jose trail network. Also, this location experienced a dramatic 86% trail usage increase in 2008, making it the subject of intense interest this year.

Count Station Descriptions

1. **Guadalupe River Trail at Coleman Avenue:** The station is centrally located near downtown San José where many people enjoy the 250-acre Guadalupe River Park and the trail borders large employers and housing developments. The Guadalupe River Trail system extends 9 miles and links residential neighborhoods to the urban core (technology and financial industry, government, and retail/restaurants) and Silicon Valley’s Golden Triangle to the north (major employers include Cisco, Cadence, eBay).
2. **Guadalupe River Trail at Park Avenue:** This station has similar characteristics to the Coleman Avenue station noted above. It is closer to the core of downtown San Jose and is immediately adjacent to a major employer (Adobe Systems, Inc.) and perpendicular to pedestrian/bicycle traffic originating from the Diridon Station (Caltrain, Amtrak, VTA-Light Rail).
3. **Highway 87 Bikeway at Tamien Station:** The trail system is parallel to Highway 87, with several on-street bikeways offering continuity between Downtown and South San José. The Highway 87 Bikeway is considered primarily a commuter trail because it does not lead to park sites or other recreational destinations. It does link to commuter facilities like the Chynoweth Avenue Light Rail hub station and the Tamien Station that serves Light Rail, Caltrain and local bus services.
4. **Los Gatos Creek at Auzerais Avenue:** The trail system is a short (0.5-mile) disconnected reach of the larger and very popular Los Gatos Creek Trail system. The trail links Willow Glen (via Lonus Street, near Lincoln Avenue) to mid-town, a neighborhood to the west of Downtown. Auzerais Avenue provides a low-volume arterial roadway with a signed bikeway leading directly to the Guadalupe River Park and trail near the Children’s Discovery Museum.
5. **Los Gatos Creek at Hamilton Avenue:** The trail system in this area is continuous with 9 miles of existing trails linking San José, Campbell and Los Gatos. Los Gatos Creek is recognized as one of Silicon Valley’s most popular trails. Users are drawn to the trail by its adjacency to employment, housing, and

retail. Views of the creek and access to adjacent parks and attractions encourage regular usage. eBay has a campus adjacent and accessible to the trail.

New count stations in 2009 Trail Count:

6. **Coyote Creek Trail at Tully Rd:** A newly (Aug 2009) opened reach of paved trail within one of the two major north-south trail systems in San Jose. The 0.5 mile trail extended an existing 15-mile system that leads to town of Morgan Hill in south Santa Clara County.
7. **Highway 237 Bikeway at Zanker Rd:** An existing “unofficial”/interim and unpaved east-west trail that the City hopes to upgrade in the near future. Past grant writing efforts have been unsuccessful and usage data in its current state was seen as vital for showing the need for an improved trail.

Data Collection Method

Volunteers were provided with the following tools to conduct the count. See Attachment A for a sample count sheet.

- **Count Sheet:** Trail Count volunteers kept a handwritten tally of trail users. The counting sheet was customized for 12-hour counts (for Guadalupe River Trail at Coleman Avenue) and peak-hour counts (all other count stations): The sheet provided space to count pedestrians, bicyclists and skaters, by their direction of travel. A “notes” field permits the recording of other user types (equestrian, Segway, etc.) or unusual conditions.
- **Survey “Postcard”:** A postcard-size handout was offered to all trail users asking that they complete an on-line survey. The card included some basic information about the survey, and asked trail users to complete the survey by Friday, Sept. 25. A link was posted on the Trail Program web page asking that visitors complete the Trail Count survey. Visitors to the web site found a 23-question survey for Trail Count 2009, hosted on the SurveyMonkey.com web site. This year’s survey sought to explore public safety issues in greater depth than in 2008.
- **Instructions:** A printed summary of how to conduct the counts and return the data to City staff for processing. Volunteers were asked to arrive at their count stations 15 minutes in advance. Most volunteers signed up for a 2-hour count period.
- **Treats:** Each count volunteer was provided with two granola bars as encouragement to participate and a small token of gratitude.

NOTE: Due to a lower level of City resources available, several amenities from the 2007 and 2008 Trail Count events could not be obtained this year. These included: 1) gift certificate prize incentives for the survey respondents, and 2) “Trail Count”-themed



posters and tables to help identify and raise the profile of volunteers on the trails. City staff hopes to be able to restore these features as part of next year's event.

Primary Findings

9.6% overall increase in trail usage: The overall number of trail users was 9.6% higher than in 2008, when comparing the same count stations and hours. This figure looks just at the count stations and hours that match up between the 2008 and 2009 counts. The two new count stations this year, and trail users who were counted during last year's more expansive count hours, are not included in this calculation. This figure compares Wednesdays one year apart (9/23/09 and 9/24/08). The overall percentage increase was driven largely by the substantial increase at Coleman Ave (see below), with smaller increases at two other counts stations.



23.7% increase at the busiest count station: Guadalupe River Trail at Coleman Avenue saw a 24% increase in usage this year; this was by far the largest numerical increase—531 trail users vs. 429 in Trail Count 2008—and the busiest count station. The 2008 count recorded an 86% increase at the Guadalupe River station thought to be due to a gap closure about 1 mile away. The 2009 count indicates that the big increase was not an anomaly and that gap closures can have a long-term and encouraging impact on trail use. Los Gatos Creek at Hamilton Avenue was the next busiest count station, with 367 trail users (peak-hour count only).

Increased per-person trail usage: 68% reported that their use of the San Jose trail network had increased “significantly” (39.9%) or “a little” (28.1%) in the past two years. In addition, round-trips of 10+ miles on the trails more than doubled, from 21.7% of responses in 2008 to 46.7% this year. The modality of trail usage has remained fairly constant with 72.7% (2009) and 70.4% (2008) of respondents using bicycles. Walkers and joggers on the trails were 25% in both years; other modalities of travel were observed in smaller numbers.

Trails as transportation: 53% of survey respondents reported that they were primarily using the trail to commute or run errands. The remainder of responses indicated primarily recreation-oriented usage. This high number of commuters is similar to the 2008 figure (50.9%) and adds validity to the City's inclusion of trails as goal for the Green Vision, an effort to make San Jose the center of the clean tech economy. Of the survey respondents who were commuting on the trail on the day of the survey, only 17% reported that an automobile is their primary mode of travel on a daily basis; the rest travel mainly by bicycle (62.3%), transit, walking, or some combination of these modes.

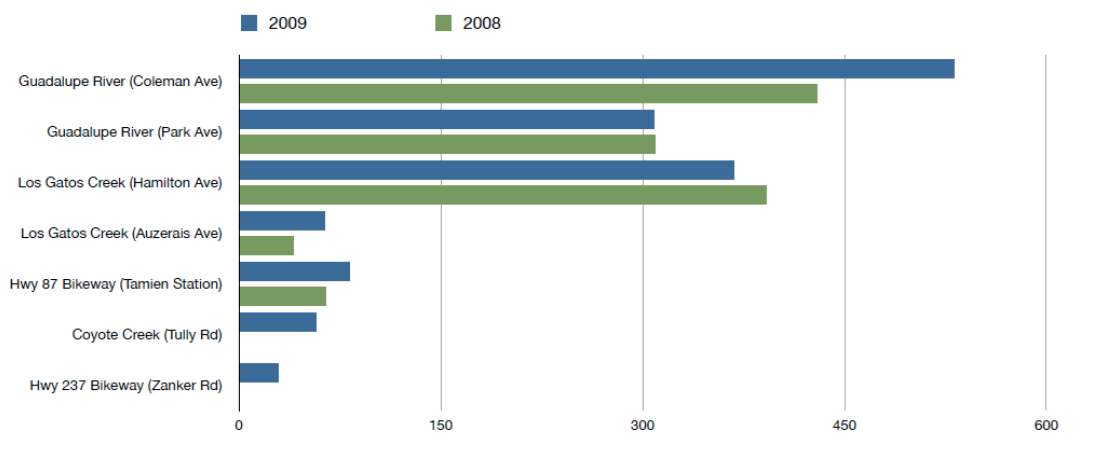
Safety on the trail network: 99.4% reported feeling “very safe” (68.3%) or “somewhat safe” (31.3%) on the trails. One respondent reported feeling unsafe

along the trails. Female respondents had a lower incidence of feeling very safe (51.7%), with 46.7% feeling only somewhat safe. No respondents indicated usage of San Jose’s existing emergency call boxes which are found along many of the trail systems.

Numerical Findings (by Individual Trail Count Station)

A total of 1,437 trail users were counted this year. The tallies for each of the individual count locations are displayed below. (For consistency with Trail Count 2009 counting methodology, the 2008 column reflects data from the 12-hour count at Coleman Ave and peak-hour trail users at the other count stations. “Off-peak” trail users were counted at Park Ave and Hamilton Ave in 2008 but not in 2009, and were excluded from the current analysis.)

Count Location	2009	2008
Guadalupe River (Coleman Ave)	531	429
Guadalupe River (Park Ave)	308	309
Los Gatos Creek (Hamilton Ave)	367	391
Los Gatos Creek (Auzerais Ave)	63	40
Hwy 87 Bikeway (Tamien Station)	82	64
Coyote Creek (Tully Rd)	57	N/A
Hwy 237 Bikeway (Zanker Rd)	29	N/A



Netting out the 86 trail users at the two new count locations this year there were 1,351 trail users at the previously established count locations, as compared to 1,233 persons counted in 2008 at the same count stations—a **9.6% overall increase in trail usage in 2009.**

The individual trails’ results included:

- **A 24% increase on the Guadalupe River Trail (Coleman Ave)**, the busiest count station. This was the only count station this year that conducted an all-day count from 7:00 AM to 7:00 PM. The number of trail users at this location was relatively steady through the day, with two activity “spikes” in the noon hour and from 6:00 to 7:00 PM and a lull from 2:00 to 5:00.
- **Small decreases at count stations:**
 - No substantial change from 2008 data at the Park Ave count station on Guadalupe River Trail—a 0.3% decrease reflecting one fewer individual trail user than in 2008
 - A 6% decrease at the Hamilton Avenue count station on Los Gatos Creek Trail. While discouraging, the decrease is possibly within a range of typical day-to-day variation, as opposed to an actual pattern of decrease in the number of trail users. It is also possible that cool, foggy weather on the morning of Trail Count 2009 contributed to fewer people using the trail. Users of the Los Gatos Creek Trail are more heavily recreation-oriented (55.7% this year) than is the case at the more transportation-oriented trails, which also could have been a factor in the observed decrease.
- **Large percentage increases at two smaller count stations:** Increases of 63% and 28%, respectively, were observed at the Los Gatos Creek Trail (Auzerais Ave) and on the Highway 87 Bikeway.
 - The Los Gatos Creek Trail system extended about 0.5 mile over the past year, with a reach opening from Auzerais Avenue to San Carlos Street. The extension was along a newly developed residential community. Extension to San Carlos Street also leads commuters to low volume streets for easier access to Diridon Railway Station. The increase was likely due to more potential users in the immediate area and better access area roadways.
 - The Highway 87 Bikeway has traditionally been heavily transportation-oriented, with 78% of users this year describing their trail experience as commute-related. With a 24% increase of usage documented along the Guadalupe River Trail, it makes sense that the Highway 87 Bikeway would have a similar increase because it leads to that trail system.

The other two count stations—Coyote Creek at Tully Road, and Highway 237 Bikeway—were new to Trail Count this year, with no 2008 data was available for comparison.

On-Line Survey Findings

Data was collected from Wednesday, September 23 to Friday, September 25. 237 survey responses were received, compared to 291 survey responses in 2008 (The 2008 survey was posted for 10 days and was related to a three Trail Count days over the course of a week, as opposed to this year’s one-



day event.) The survey included 25 multiple-choice questions, some with spaces for respondents to provide input and comments. Attachment B includes the actual responses and comments received from survey respondents. The following is a summary and analysis of the findings.

Question 1: The 46- to 55-year-old age bracket was the most common survey responder category (30.6%), followed by 36 to 45 (24.5%). A majority (52.0%) were age 46 or greater. Only 3.1% of respondents (seven individuals) were between 16 and 25 years old, and none were less than 16 years old. The survey did not examine whether the lack of youth respondents was because trails were not a convenient route to school, or because of other factors (e.g., younger people being possibly less likely to take the time to respond to surveys). It should be noted that there are few public schools near the existing reaches of the Guadalupe River and Coyote Creek Trail systems.

Question 2: 72.9% of survey respondents were male, aligning with the 74% of male trail users last year. Female trail users reported a lower overall feeling of safety on the trails; see Question 17, below.

Question 3: ZIP codes were requested for purposes of examining general patterns of trail use in relation to locations of trail users' residences. This analysis has not yet been conducted, but the collected data could be useful for future study. All survey information was provided anonymously.

Question 4: Trails most used on the Trail Count day were Guadalupe River (64.2%) and Los Gatos Creek (32.6%).

Coyote Creek and the Highway 87 and 237 Bikeways also each received about 20%, indicating that many trail users are using more than one trail system per day. Survey respondents were able to check boxes for as many trails as were applicable to their trip on that day.



Question 5: Respondents indicated that "word of mouth" was the single most common (57.0%) means by which they had learned about the City of San Jose trail network.

Question 6: Bicycling was by far (72.7%) the most common activity on the trail, followed by walking/hiking (15.9%) and jogging (9.1%). These figures were similar to the 2008 data, with the incidence of bicycling showed a slight increase from 70.4% last year.

Question 7: The average (“mean”) of the respondents’ self-reported daily round-trip mileage on the trail network was 11.6 miles; this figure excludes the 8% of people who took the survey but left the answer to this question blank. The median round-trip journey was 8.0 miles. The table, below, compares 2009 and 2008 survey responses regarding daily round-trip mileages traveled on the trails.

Length of daily round-trip journey (in miles)	2009	2008
0-3	19.8%*	29.6%
3-6	20.8%	28.2%
6-10	12.7%	20.6%
10+	46.7%	21.7%

* Only 2.3% of the total were round-trips less than 1 mile.

The collected data show a substantial proportional increase in the number of daily round-trips that were greater than 10 miles. The increase may be largely owing to increased trail usage on the Guadalupe River Trail. This trail is the longest system in the City’s network at about 9 miles (one way), and is heavily used by bicycle commuters traveling relatively long distances to employment centers in North San Jose. 20.3% of the responses reported round-trips of 19 miles or greater; it can therefore be inferred that a substantial number of respondents are using more than one trail system, or a combination of trails and on-street travel as part of their trail usage.

Question 8: 53.0% of respondents indicated that either Commuting (49.3%) or Running Errands (3.7%) was the primary purpose of their trail use on Trail Count day. Conversely, 47.0% of respondents’ primary activity was Recreation/ Exercise/ Fitness. These numbers were very similar to last year’s results. These slightly revised figures include several respondents who chose “other” but whose actual responses fit within one category or the other.

Question 9: Bicycle (40.5%) and “Automobile (includes ride share, carpooling)” (38.3%) were the two most common self-reported primary modes of daily travel for this year’s survey respondents. These figures were similar to last year’s 44.5% and 34.3%, respectively, and seem consistent with the 53% of responders identifying themselves as commuters or errand-runners in responding to Question 8. Transit, or some combination of transit and bicycling and walking, totaled 14 to 15 percent of responses in both 2009 and 2008 data.



Question 10: “Exercise/fitness/health” (82.3%)

was the most common motivation that respondents gave for using the trails. This reason was the main motivation for 78.3% of those trail users whose main purpose for using the trail network on the day of the survey was for commuting or transportation. For all respondents, saving money and concern for the environment each received about 30%, with other reasons receiving smaller counts.

Question 11: 75.4% of respondents use the trail network about 2-3 times per week (47.6%) or five or more times per week (27.8%). Less-frequent usage—once a week or less—totaled less than 25% of responses.

Question 12: Only 11.1% of respondents indicated they use the trail on weekends exclusively (note: the count was conducted only on one day, a Wednesday, this year). Far more common was weekday use (48.9%) or both weekdays and weekends (40%).

Question 13: Most (72.5%) of the respondents reported using the trail network by themselves. 14.4% were with a friend or family member, plus 1.8% doing so with a child in a stroller. 9% were in a group of two or more.

Question 14: Nobody reported ever having used an emergency call box on the trails. Eighteen respondents submitted comments responding to this question, most of which indicated that the person had never seen any such call boxes, or had seen them but expressed concern about the call boxes seeming to be inoperable much of the time.



Question 15: 77.1% reported that they generally carry a cellular phone on the trails; the other 22.9% indicated they do not.

Question 16: This open-ended question asking for suggestions regarding possible trail safety improvements elicited 129 responses, which may be viewed as an attachment to this report. 39 (30.2%) of the responses were submitted by female trail users, who represented 27.1% of the overall population of survey respondents. A large number of the responses addressed the subject areas of improving lighting conditions on the trails, increasing police patrols, attracting more users to the trails to provide for more natural surveillance, and addressing vagrancy and encampments in trailside areas.

Question 17: 99.4 % of survey respondents reported feeling “very safe” (68.3%) or “somewhat safe” (31.3%) on the trails. One individual reported feeling unsafe along the trails. Women were less likely than average to report feeling very safe and more likely to feel only somewhat safe (51.7% and 46.7%, respectively). In a differently structured question in the 2008 survey, respondents were asked to rate trail safety

on a scale from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). The mean average response in 2008 was 3.6, and the median was 4. A score of 4 was also the “mode” (i.e., most common response), receiving 46% of the 291 responses.

Question 18: Almost half (47.6%) of respondents reported spending 30 to 60 minutes on the trails on an average visit. 31.0% spent one to two hours, and 18.3% spent less than 30 minutes. Average trips of more than two hours were 3.1% of the responses.

Question 19: 68% reported that their use of the San Jose trail network has increased “significantly” (39.9%) or “a little” (28.1%) in the past two years. Per-person usage stayed about the same for 26.8%, decreased a little for 4.4%, and decreased significantly for 0.9% (two individuals).

Question 20: Exercise/fitness/health was the main (59.3%) reason cited for the per-person changes in trail usage referenced in Question 19. This figure, plus the 8.2% that cited convenience and 4.1% for reasons of saving money, closely align with the 68% rate of increased usage in Question 19. The second most-common response of “not applicable” (21.6%) appears to align mainly with the “stayed about the same” category in Question 19. “Concern for the environment” garnered 4.1%. Other reasons totaled less than 2%.

Question 21: 48.9% of respondents were interested, and 37.1% were possibly interested in participating in a Trail Watch program, if a program were to be established in the future. 14.0% were not interested in participating.

Question 22: 24.3% of respondents indicate that they do work for employers that support trail usage, and 75.7% indicated they do not (some of the comments submitted on the “no” responses clarified that the respondent is not employed). Of the overall responses, 9% responded “no” but were interested in being contacted by the City to support efforts to promote trail usage.

Question 23: This open-ended question asking for any additional feedback elicited 121 responses, which may be viewed as an attachment to this report.

Possible Motivating Factors

Trail Count 2009 documented an increase in usage across the trail network. No formal campaign or programming has been put in place to increase usage. It appears that the increased usage is occurring through the interest of individuals seeking opportunities for exercise, to save money, to reduce environmental impacts and several other factors.

Some external influences that may encourage the use of local trails could be:

- Amgen Tour of California – San Jose has hosted starts and finishes.
- Local employers encourage and sponsor bike commuting events.

- Increase size of trail network and closure of gaps.
- Provision of trail website postcards to downtown hotels and the Silicon Valley Chamber of Commerce.
- San Jose's urban trails referenced in two local hiking guides.
- Monthly updates about trail development on the Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalitions website.
- Downtown Tourist website references trails as a travel option.
- References in national publications: Forbes (3rd Fittest City in nation, trails referenced), Prevention (Largest urban trail network), US News & World Report (3rd Best City for Kids, trails referenced).



Conclusion

Trail Count 2009 results showed solid gains in overall trail usage: A 9.6% increase over the same time last year, with a 23.7% increase on a core trail within the network that leads to recreation and employment (Guadalupe River Trail). No substantial changes in programming or promotions have occurred over the past year to encourage greater trail usage, so the measured increases appear to be from more and more people individually choosing to make use of trails.

Survey responses were also encouraging: 68% of respondents reported that their usage of the trail network in San Jose has been increasing in the past two years, and the percentage of daily trail round-trips that were 10+ miles more than doubled since last year.

Recognition of the trails as a viable means of transportation from home to work and other practical daily needs, as well as a place for recreation and exercise, remains strong. Approximately 53% of survey respondents continued to report using the trails primarily for commuting and transportation.

At the same time, the health benefits accruing from physical activity figured strongly as a motivating factor for all trail users, including trail commuters. A large majority (around 80% of all respondents, including trail commuters) identified "exercise/fitness health/" as their main motivation for choosing to use the trail network. Most respondents (68%) stated that their use of the trail network has increased in the past two years, and exercise/fitness/health was the number-one reason (75.7% of applicable responses) cited for the increased usage. The strong interest in physical fitness and health could be correlated with the large increase in the proportion of long trips (10+ miles round trip) observed in this year's survey responses.

Consistent with the previous years' observations, the trail users who responded to the on-line survey were more likely to be male (72.9%) and older than the general population (52% age 46 or greater).

The Guadalupe River Trail continues to be the most popular trail in the San Jose network, followed by Los Gatos Creek Trail. Data from two new count stations will provide a baseline for comparison in future annual Trail Count studies.

The vast majority of surveyed trail users reported feeling safe when spending time on the San Jose trail network, though very high levels of feeling safe were more pronounced for men than for women users of the trail network. Survey respondents submitted many suggestions for enhancing the existing safety measures on the trails. Trails Program staff will work toward integrating the feedback gathered from Trail Count into the program's ongoing efforts to improve and expand the trail network.

Acknowledgement

Trails Program staff would like to thank the City's partner agencies and the dozens of individual community volunteers who helped make Trail Count 2009 a successful event.

Learn more about San Jose's Trail Network at:
www.sjpark.org/trails