



TRAIL COUNT

2012



In partnership with:
Guadalupe River Park Conservancy
Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition
Five Wounds Neighborhood / Communiversy

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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 2012 was conducted on Wednesday, September 19, 2012. Six count stations were established to measure usage along 3 existing trails and one future trail alignment.

Some key findings about this year's Trail Count event are noted below. Detailed results about Trail Count 2012 are explored in greater detail as part of this report.

Significant increase in trail usage:

- **(+34.5%)** Guadalupe River Trail at San Fernando Street.
- **(+13.9%)** Los Gatos Creek Trail and Hamilton Avenue.

Trail users report that trails feel clean, safe, well-maintained and "more fun than driving".



Usage even with challenges: **(+3.4%)** Guadalupe River Trail at Coleman Avenue. *This increase occurred even with the nearby Lower Guadalupe River Trail closed for paving.*

Trails are a preferred travel option: Users cite convenience, savings and environmental stewardship as key reasons for use of San José trails.

Regular and steady use: 63% of respondents use a trail from 1 to 5x per week. 24% use trails daily.

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 Downtown San Jose's frequent special events. A formal Trail Closure Policy was instituted due to the documented number of affected trail users. Since then, Trail Count's objectives have expanded to quantify the number of daily trail users, how the individual trail systems are being used (e.g., for recreation or transportation), user perceptions, and year-to-year changes in trail usage.

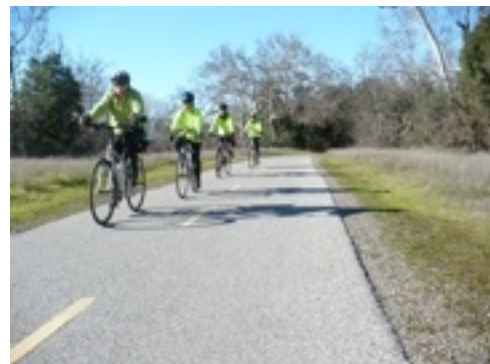
The survey component of Trail Count is used to gather comments and suggestions from trail users on current operations, their needs and suggestions for improvements.

Data gathered from Trail Count makes the City more competitive for limited grant funding. \$1,600,000 in grant funding was secured from grants during Fiscal Year 2011-12. *Grant applications commonly ask for usage and other data which is only available by conducting Trail Count.*

Seeking trail usage data is consistent with the Trail Program's vision of becoming the national leader for trail integration in the urban environment. Data collection provides staff with the information necessary to make better planning, design and operational decisions.

The primary data collection objectives were:

1. Ascertain typical daily usage volume.
2. Determine trail user needs, demographics and perceptions.
3. Confirm that trails support both recreational and commute uses.



Partnership

Trail Count relies heavily on volunteers to count trail users and distribute survey cards - Trail Count participants included:

- **Guadalupe River Park Conservancy** managed and staffed the Coleman Avenue Count Station.
- **Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition** supported outreach to its many members.
- **Five Wounds Neighborhood / CommuniversiTY** managed and staffed the Five Wounds station at Story Road.
- **City of San Jose - Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services** managed the overall event and volunteer recruitment for remaining count stations.

Analysis

Planning Process

This year's count was held on September 19. 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 making data timely.
5. The month is recommended by the [National Pedestrian and Bicycle Documentation project](#).

Six count stations were established in this year's Trail Count:

1. Guadalupe River Trail at Coleman Ave (12-hour count)
2. Guadalupe River Trail at San Fernando St (12-hour count)
3. Los Gatos Creek at Auzerais Ave (Peak Hour count)
4. Los Gatos Creek at Hamilton Ave (12-hour count)
5. Five Wounds Corridor at Story Rd (Peak Hour count)
6. Los Alamitos Creek Trail near Camden Ave (12-hour count)

The future Five Wounds Trail alignment (between Story Road and Highway 101) was counted for a second year to support the community to advocate for land acquisition by the City and trail development. This was a shift from the Santa Clara Street location in 2011. Because the Count is not measuring travel along an existing paved trail, the shifting of count stations permits the City to understand the future potential usage. This year's location was Story Road. The counting process assumed that persons walking in the north-south direction (direction of the future trail) would be a likely audience for the trail once developed.

A *12-hour count* at all stations is highly desirable. However, volunteer resources are limited. Peak Hour counts (7:00-9:00 AM and 4:00-6:00 PM) were used at stations 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 Bicycle and Pedestrian Documentation Project's standard recommended counting interval for a PM Peak week day count is 5:00-7:00 PM. However, their recommendations states that "if you have been doing counts using previously established time periods, please keep using these same time periods for all future counts to be consistent." The City of San Jose has previously used 4:00 to 6:00 PM as its peak hour which is consistent with automotive commutes.)



Count Station Descriptions

1. **Guadalupe River Trail at Coleman Avenue:** The station is located north of downtown San José where many people enjoy the 250-acre Guadalupe River Park & Gardens. The park's continuous trail borders large employers and housing developments. The Guadalupe River Trail system extends 9 miles from downtown to Silicon Valley's Golden Triangle (major employers include Cisco, Cadence, eBay).
2. **Guadalupe River Trail at San Fernando Street:** This station is centrally located in Downtown San José. It is immediately near a major employment (Adobe Systems, and other large downtown employers). Counts have previously occurred a few hundred feet away at Park Avenue. That prior count station was not ideal for counts because of the trails circuitous ramps which may have led to inaccurate data collection.
3. **Los Gatos Creek at Auzerais Avenue:** This reach of the regional trail system is disconnected and short (0.5-mile). The trail links Willow Glen (by way of Lonus Street, near Lincoln Avenue) to midtown, 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.
4. **Los Gatos Creek at Hamilton Avenue:** The regional 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. The trail is near employment, housing, retail and park/open space.
5. **Five Wounds Corridor at Story Road:** This former railway corridor was acquired by the regional transit agency for the BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit) project. Land between Highway 101 / Lower Silver Creek to Story Road is likely to be developed as a landscaped urban trail at a future date. The community is well organized and advocating strongly for this development. Although currently undeveloped, the linear parcels are used by the community to walk through the neighborhood. Data collection at this early stage helps to show a need for future trail development.
6. **Los Alamitos Creek Trail near Camden Avenue:** The 6-mile trail system links to Lake Almaden, Calero Creek and Guadalupe River Trail. The trail system travels through open space bounded by low density residential development.

Data Collection Method

Volunteers were provided with the following tools.

- **Count Sheet:** Trail Count volunteers kept a handwritten tally of trail users. The counting sheet was customized for 12-Hour and Peak-Hour counts. The sheet provided space to count pedestrians, bicyclists and skaters, and their direction of travel. The survey included a "notes" field so counters could record all types

(equestrian, Segway, etc.) or unusual conditions.

- Survey “Postcard”:** A postcard was to have offered to all trail users. The card included some basic information about the survey, and asked trail users to complete the survey between September 19 and 23. Visitors to the Trail Program web site found an 18-question survey for Trail Count 2012. ***NOTE:** Staff observed that some volunteers were not actively giving cards to trail users so the survey findings are heavily weighted by input received from Los Alamitos Creek Trail users.*
- Instructions:** Counting directions were provided to all volunteers. Volunteers were asked to arrive at their count stations 15 minutes in advance and to fax/ email the completed sheet at the end of their shift to limit risk of data lost for an entire day. No data was lost as part of this year’s count.



Numerical Findings (by Individual Trail Count Station)

Over 2,200 trail users were counted this year. The table includes past count data for comparative purposes.

COUNT LOCATION	2010	2011	2012	Change ('11 vs. '12)
Guadalupe River Trail at Coleman Avenue	561	593	613	+3.4%
Guadalupe River Trail at San Fernando Street *	699	496	657	+34.5%
Los Gatos Creek at Hamilton Avenue	1080	1033	1177	+13.9%
Los Gatos Creek at Auzerais Avenue	102	157	157	0%
Los Alamitos Creek near Camden Avenue	---	843	897	+6.4%
Total	2442	3122	3501	+12.1%
NEW STATION				
Five Wounds Trail (future) at Story Road	---	---	82	

* Counts have previously been conducted at Park Avenue. The San Fernando Station is located several hundred feet to the north and views the same travel corridor, but offers a

more straightforward alignment to count (less potential for multiple counting of a single user)

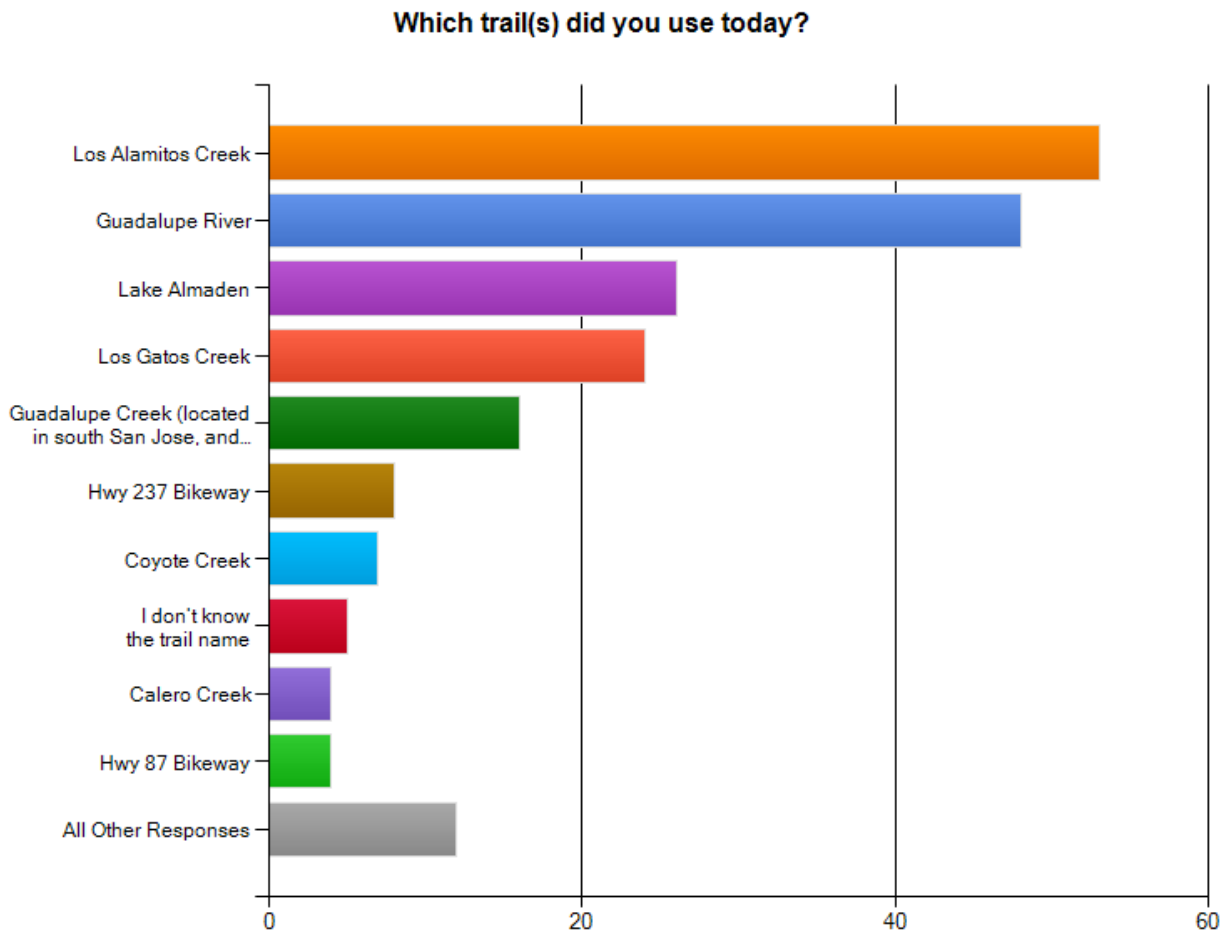
On-Line Survey Findings

The on-line survey collected data from September 19 to 23. There were 137 responses received (188 in 2011). The survey included multiple-choice questions, some with spaces for respondents to provide input and comments. Staff believes that there was a drop in responses since cards were not actively given to count users at all stations.

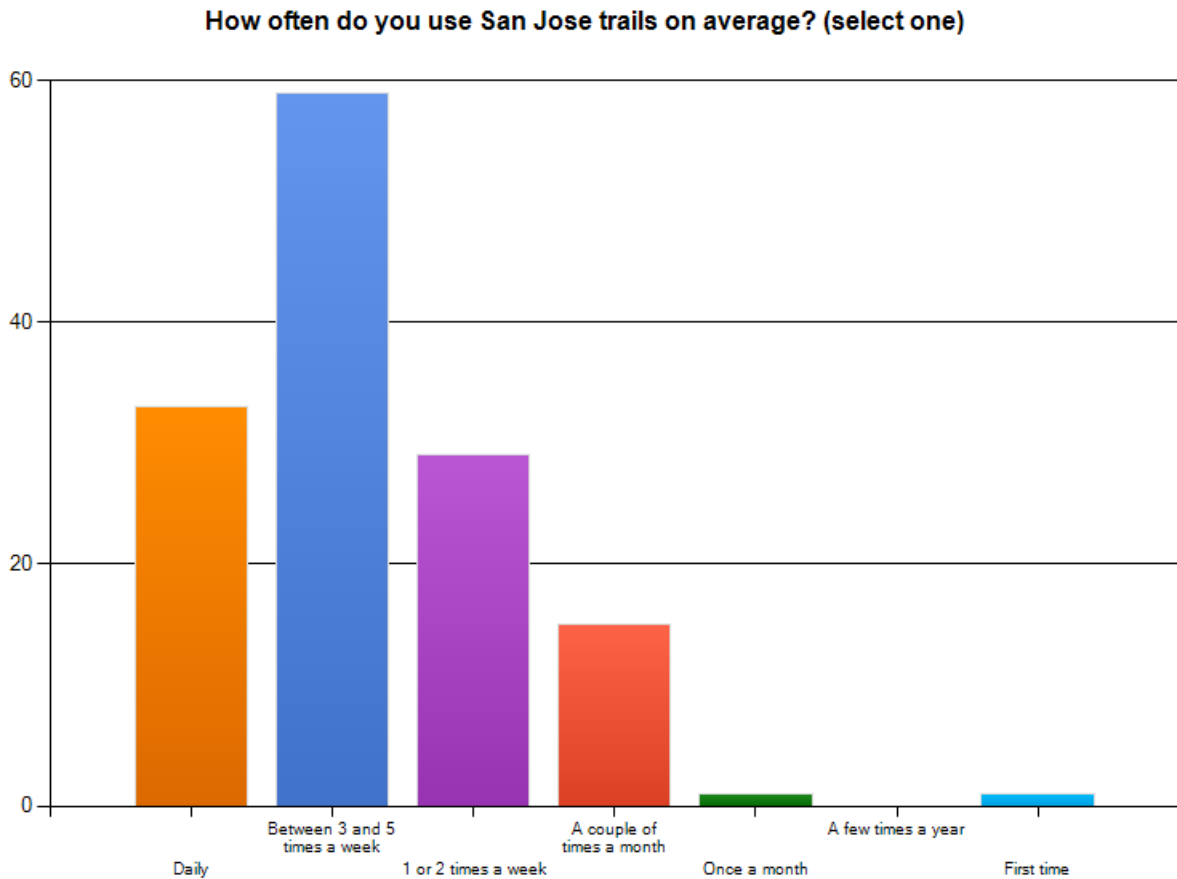
Survey Findings

Which trail system did you use today? A large share of survey responders indicated use of the Los Alamitos Creek Trail. This is not likely an accurate reflection of network-wide daily use because of the limited count stations and because few cards were distributed along the Guadalupe River Trail (San Fernando Street and Coleman Avenue Stations). With next year's count, better training will be provided to maximize the number of survey post cards distributed.

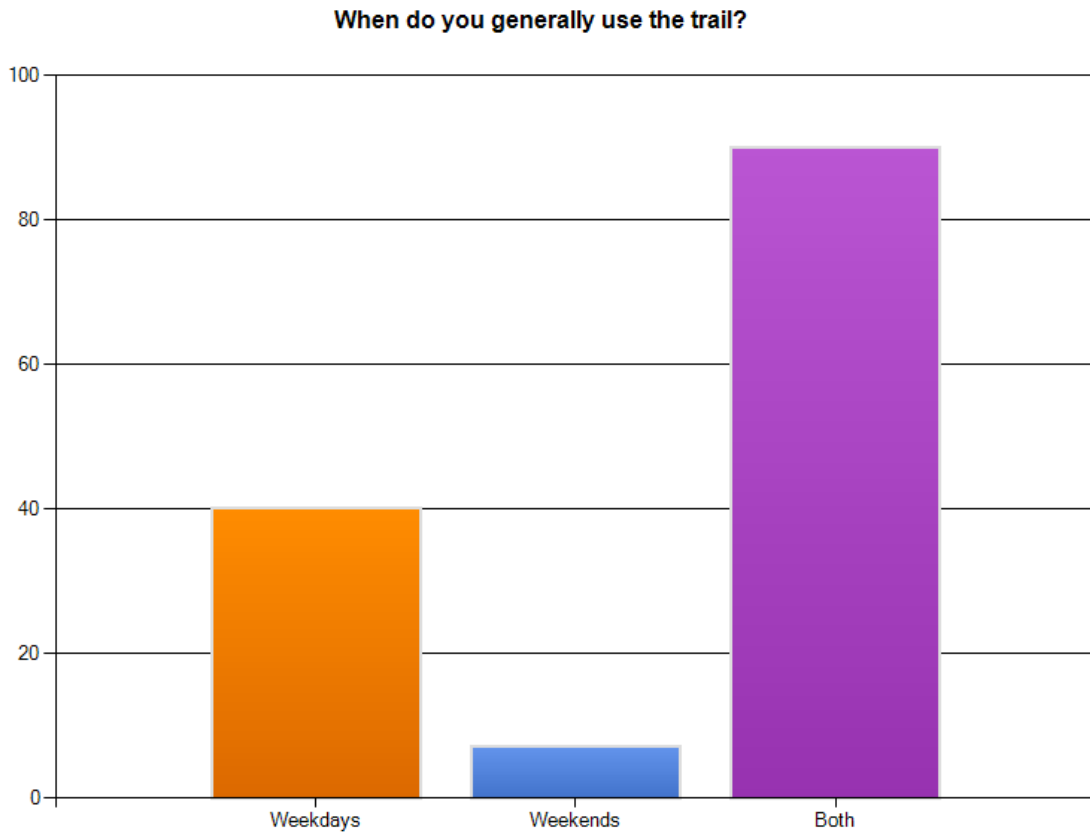
Several trail systems appear on the response that did not have a count station, so this finding does show that people are traveling between trail systems.



How often do you use the trails? A majority of survey responders indicated frequent use with 3 to 5 visits per week. The chart below is very similar to data collected in 2011. There are very few infrequent trail users.

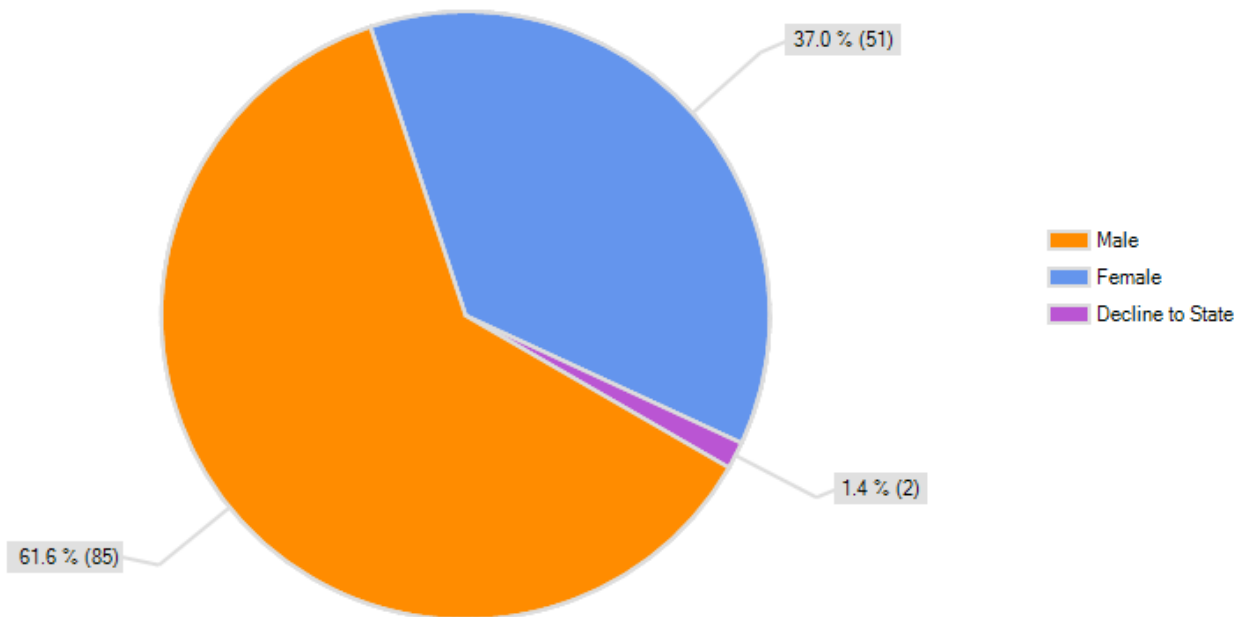


When do you use the trails? A majority of responders indicated that they use the trails both on weekdays and weekends. A large majority reported the same last year. However, the number of persons reporting that they use trails on weekends declined substantially. This information is not likely statically relevant because of the small number of survey postcards distributed. Additionally, the count occurred on a weekday so the number of “weekend” users may be underrepresented.

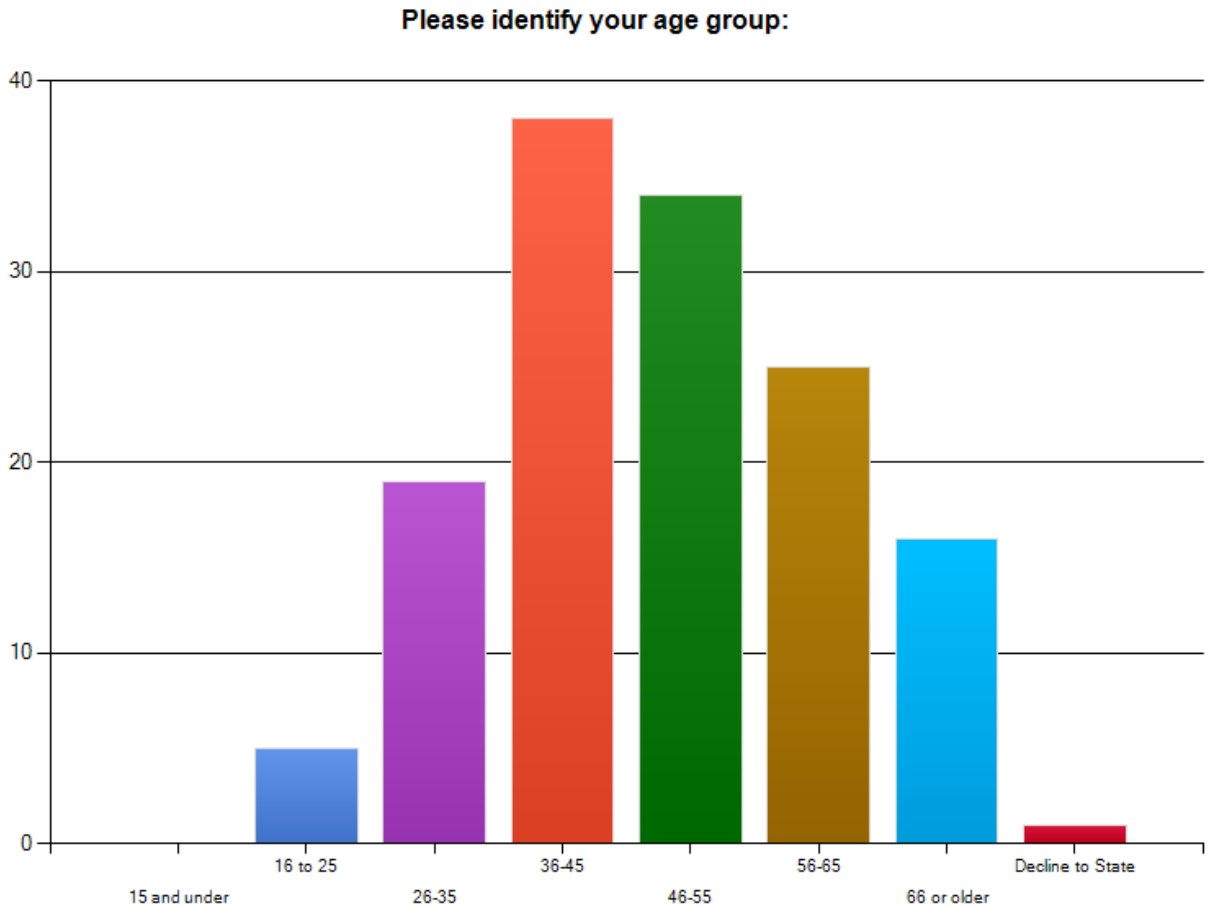


What is your gender? As in past years, we found that a large majority of trail users are male (70% in 2011, and 75% in 2010). Past surveys have identified concerns about safety as a potential limiting factor for females. This year's count saw an increase from the past 25 to 30% range, the survey found that 37% of responders were female. This data may indicate a growing sense of comfort for females or may reflect that the Los Alamitos Creek and Los Gatos Creek Trail systems has more female users. Both trail systems appear to have few vagrant encampments so there may be fewer discouraging factors to limit females from using trails.

What is your gender?

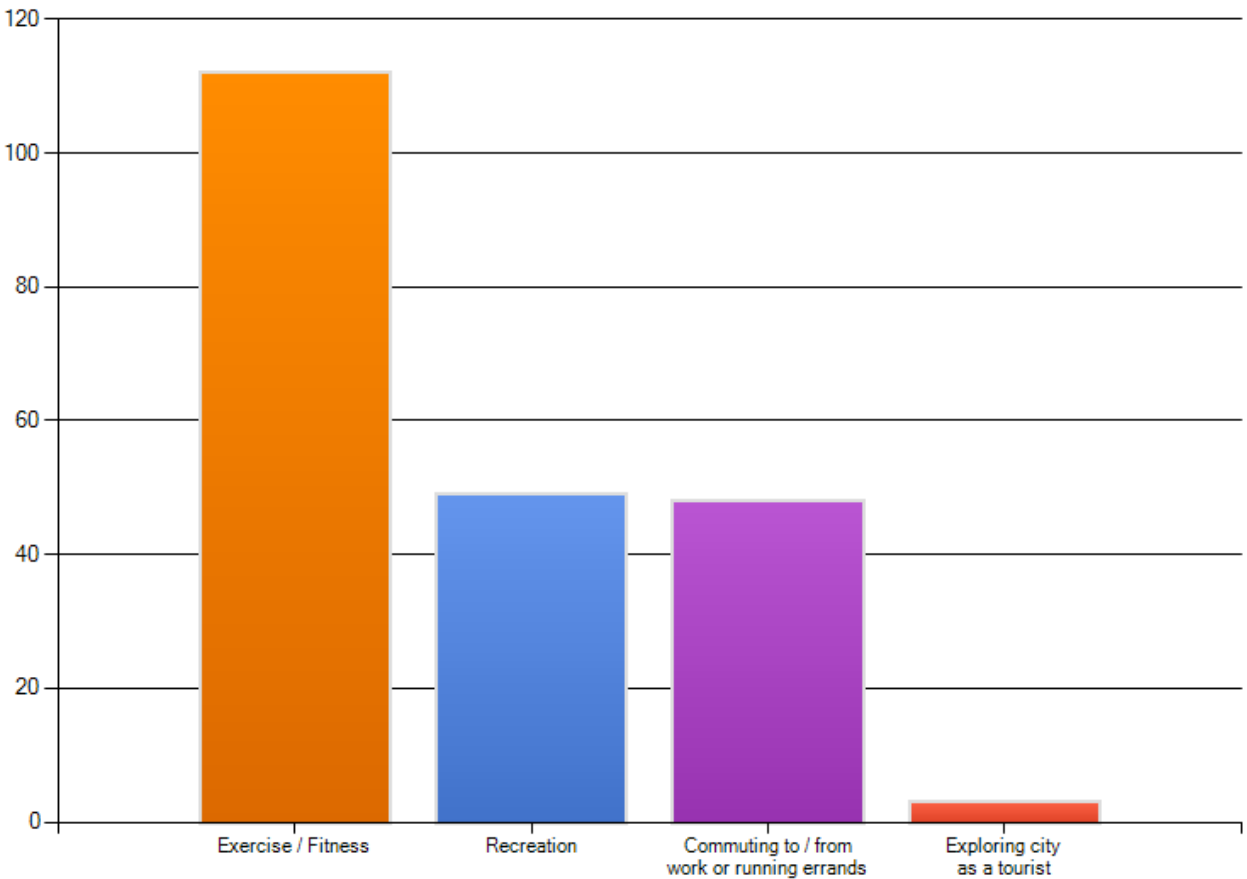


What is your age? The majority of trail users are between 26 and 55 years of age. No children responded to the survey. There was a 19% increase in persons between agencies of 56 and 65. This is likely due to a higher number of survey responders from the Los Alamitos and Los Gatos Creek trails which serve more residential and less-commute likely neighborhoods. If the count had occurred on a weekend, we would have likely seen children as part of family outings. There findings are similar to data collected in 2011.

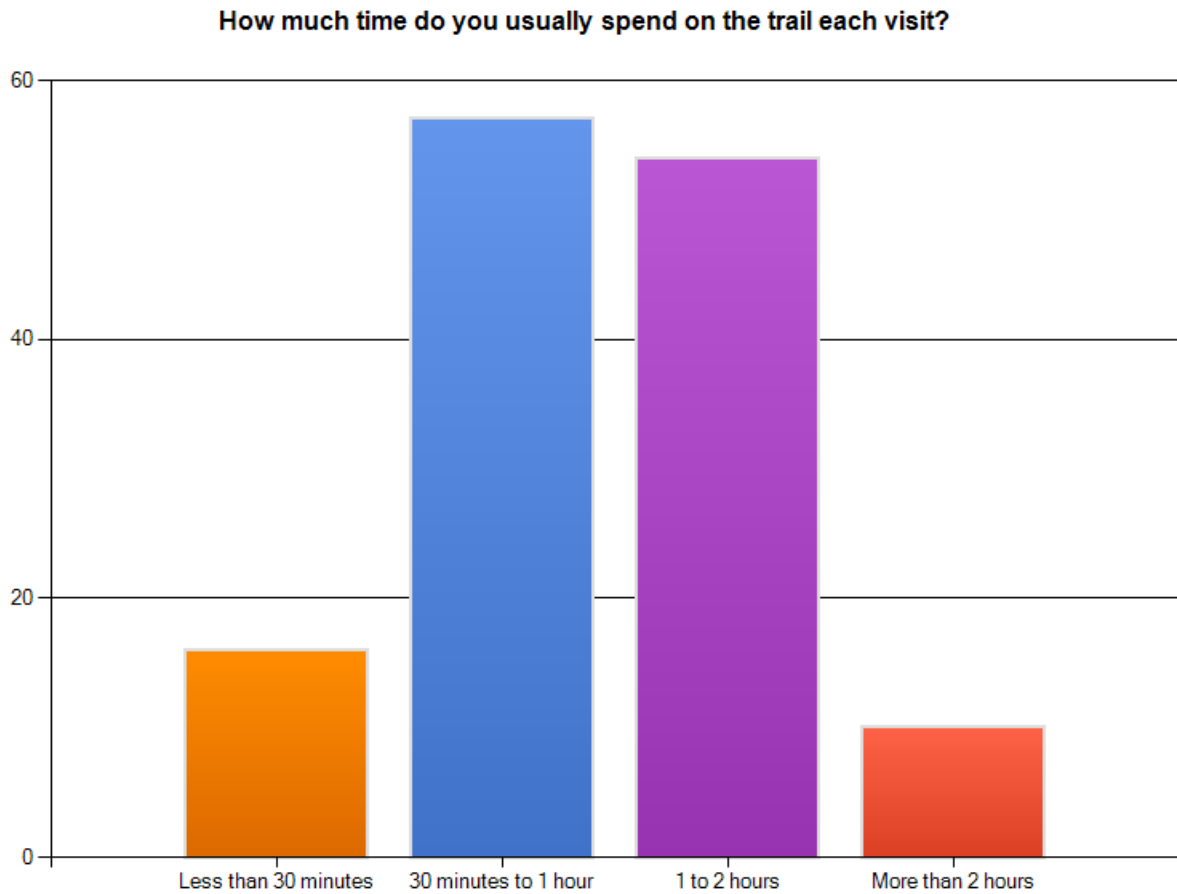


Why do you use the trails? We saw an increase in users reporting that they use trails for exercise and fitness. Approximately 3x more were exercising than commuting. Past counts gathered more survey data from the Guadalupe River Trail with 54% reporting commute purpose in 2011. A small number of respondents reported “tourism” as their primary reason for a visit. This was a new survey option for 2012. Staff will continue to track this category to see if City efforts to grow and connect the network increase awareness and interest by persons not living or working within San Jose.

Why are you using the San Jose Trail Network?

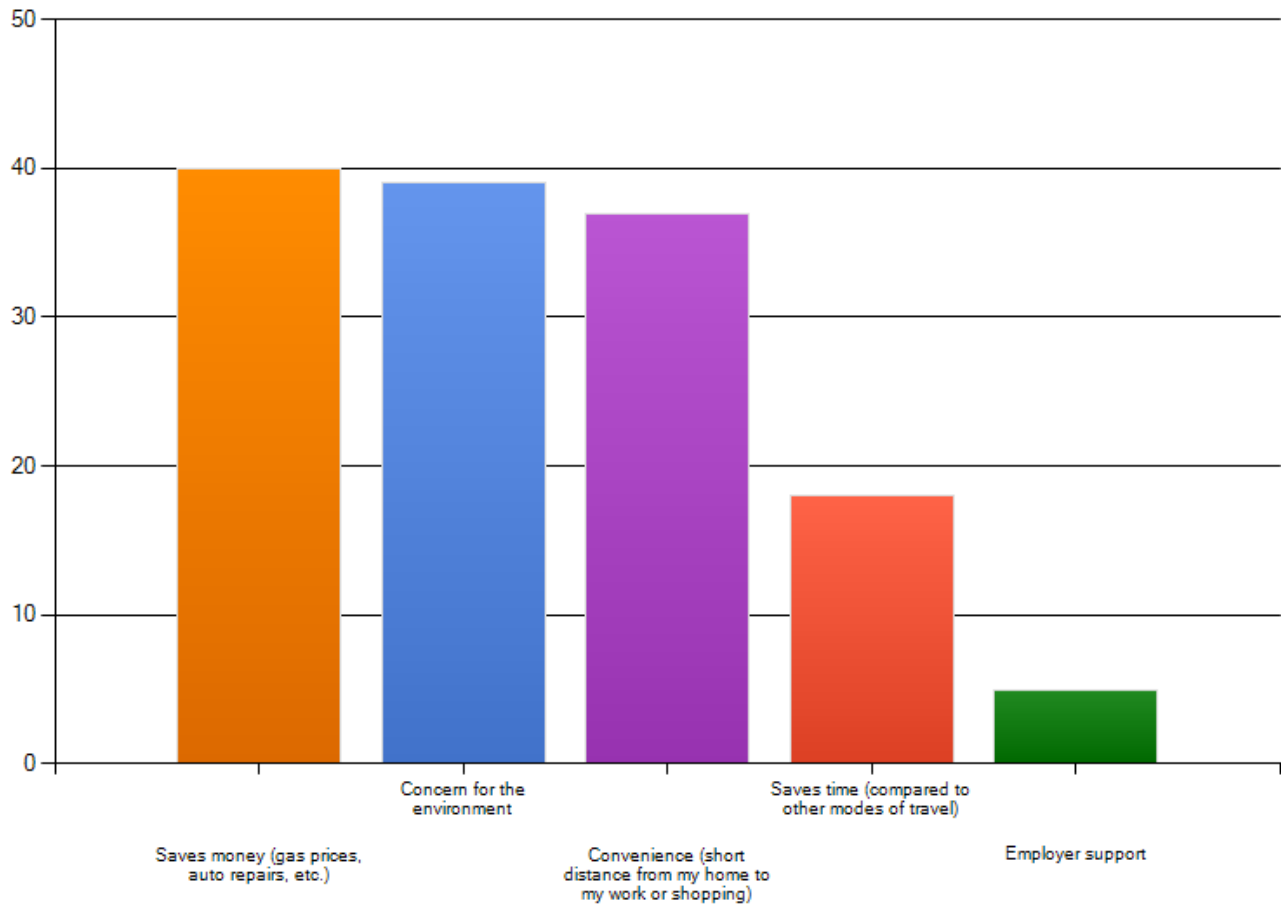


How much time do you generally spend on the trail? Most users responded trail visits of between 30 minutes and 2 hours. We measured a slight increase in persons using the trails for more than 2 hours.

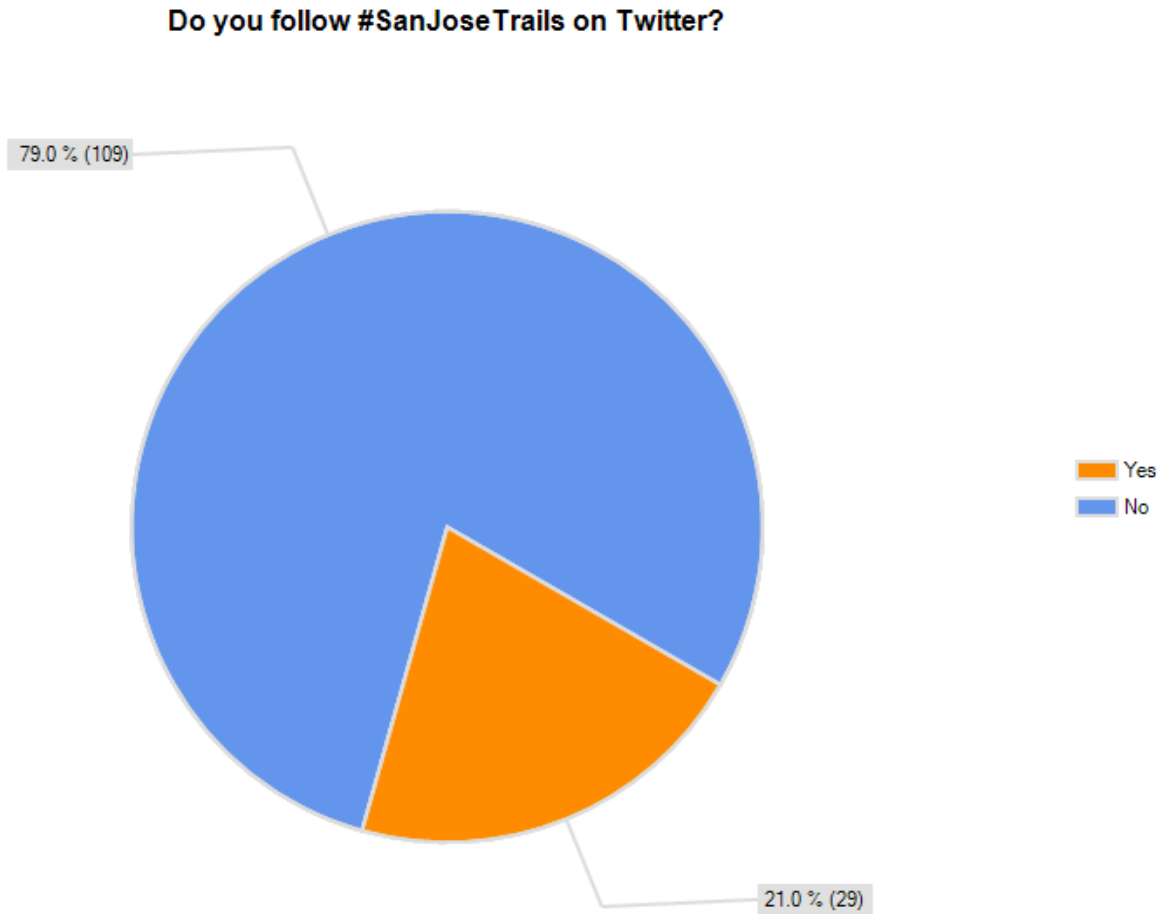


If using San Jose Trails for travel, which factors make it a preferred option? This was a new question for the survey. Saving money, concern for environment and convenience were citing as primary factors. In last year's more general question that includes fitness/exercise as the preferred answer, we saw few responding that saving time was a factor. This year's survey saw that reason increase (3% to 35%). Future surveys may explore this response further.

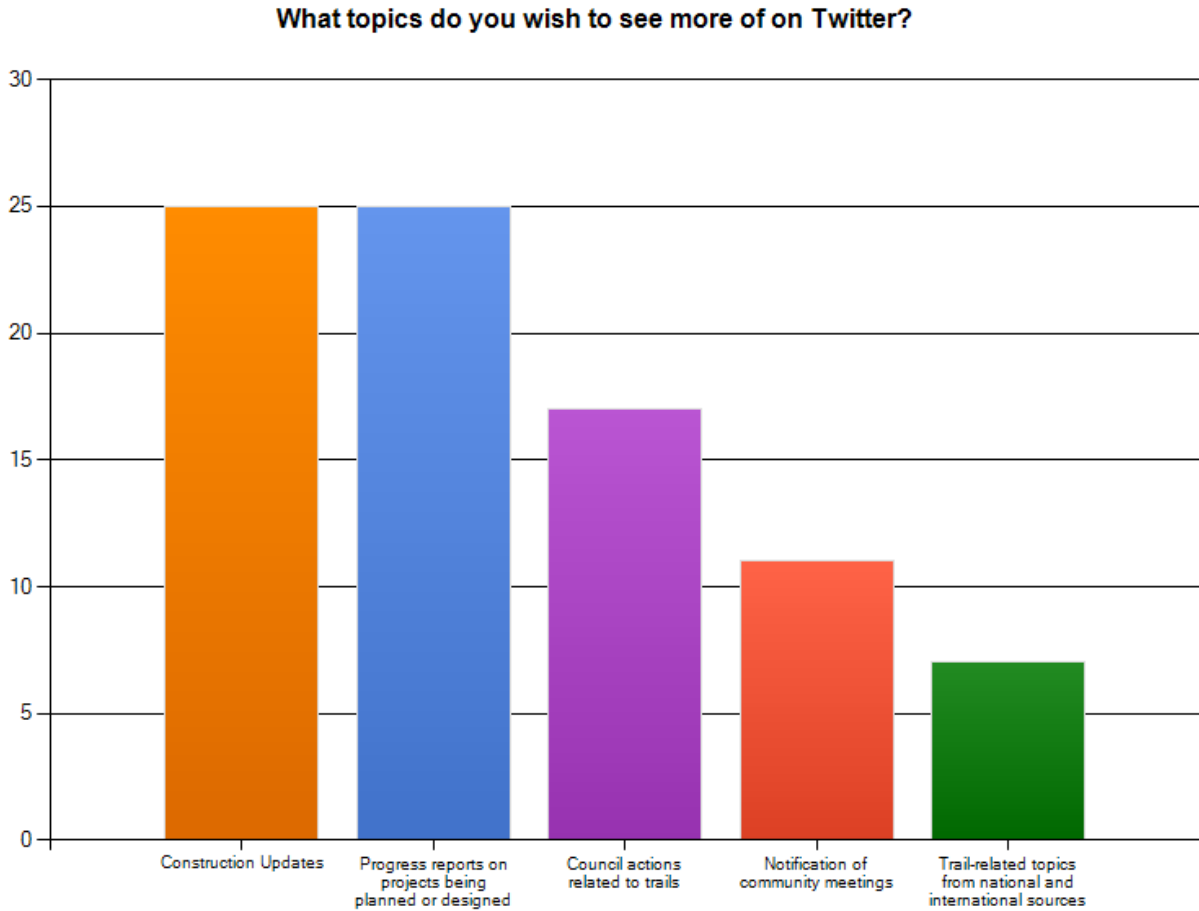
If using San Jose Trails for travel, which factors make it a preferred option:



Do you follow #SanJoseTrails on Twitter? 79% of survey respondents reporting following the San Jose Trails postings on Twitter. As of September 2012, there are 287 followers, with 743 Tweets over the past 2 years.

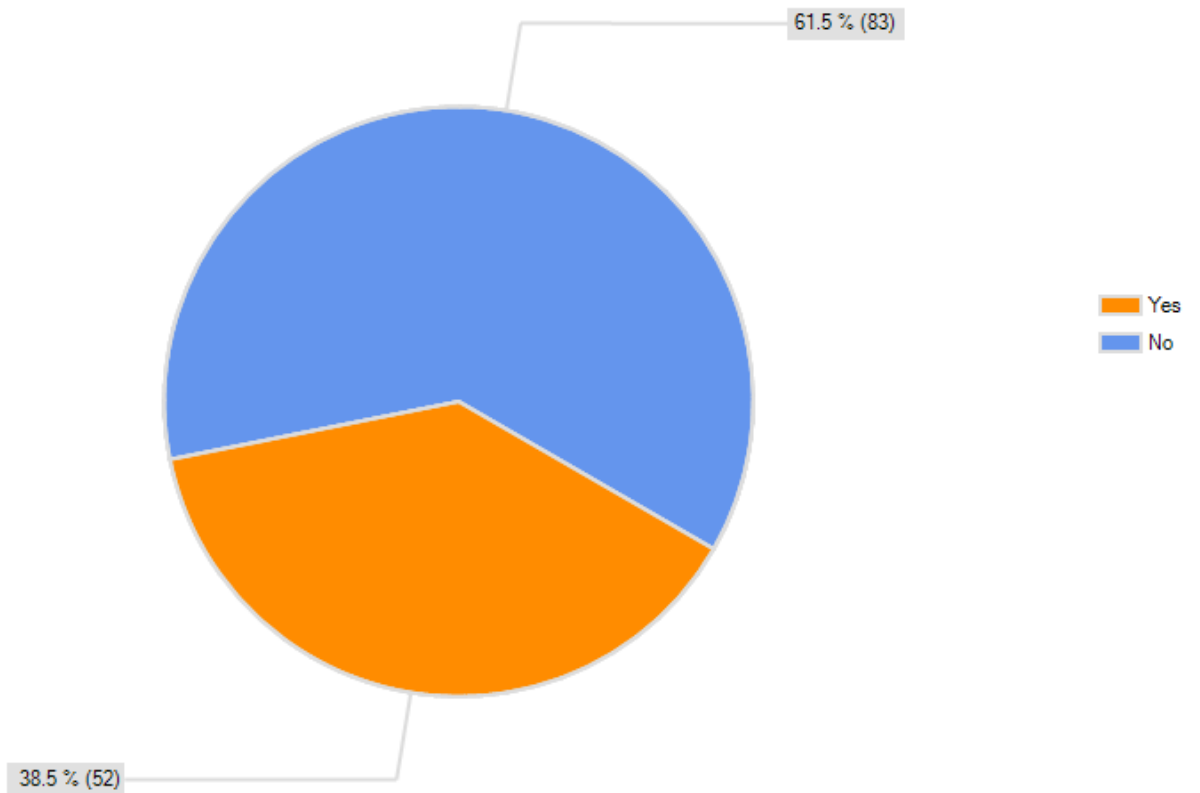


What topics do you wish to see more of on Twitter? Survey responders said that Construction Updates and Progress Reports on current projects were of most interest.



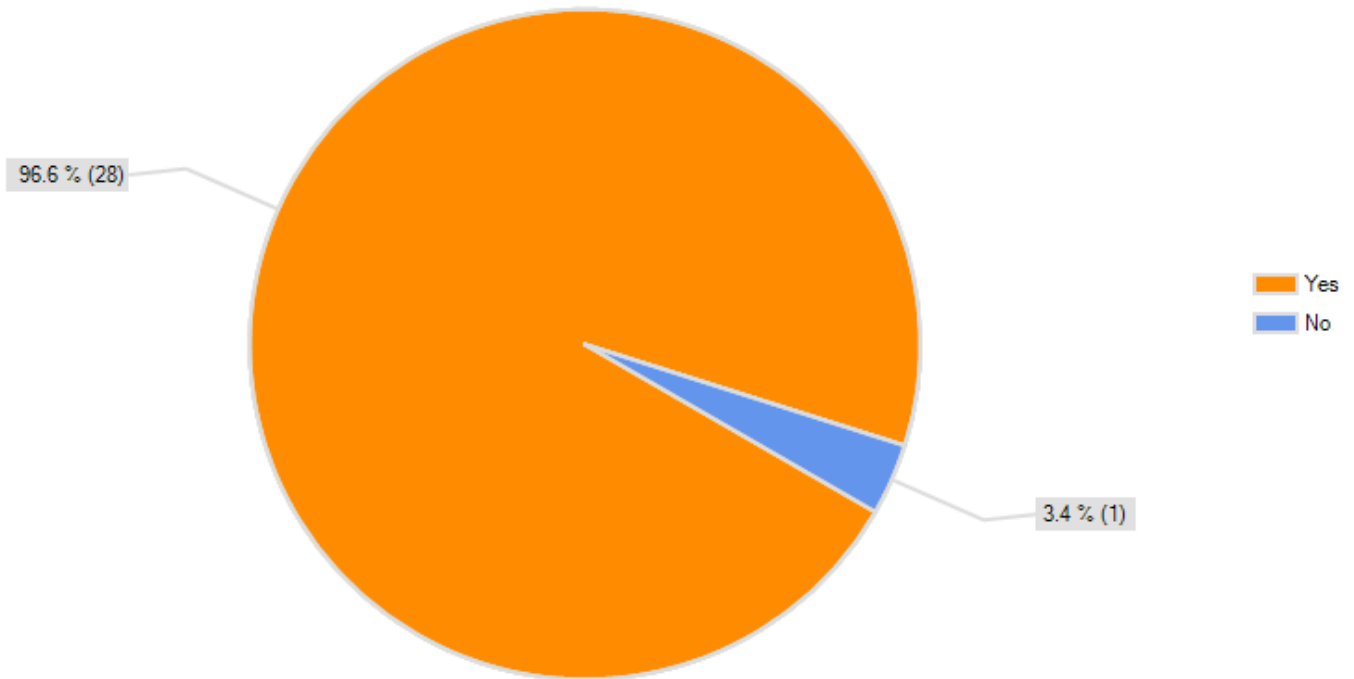
Have you obtained trail updates from alternate sources? Staff share Trail Program updates via Twitter, Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition blog, Construction Updates page and outreach to local media. 38.5% reported obtaining updates through these sources.

San Jose has increased its efforts in the past year to share information about trail development (Twitter, monthly posting on Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition, Construction Updates webpage, and outreach to local media sources). Have you obtained updates through any of these sources?



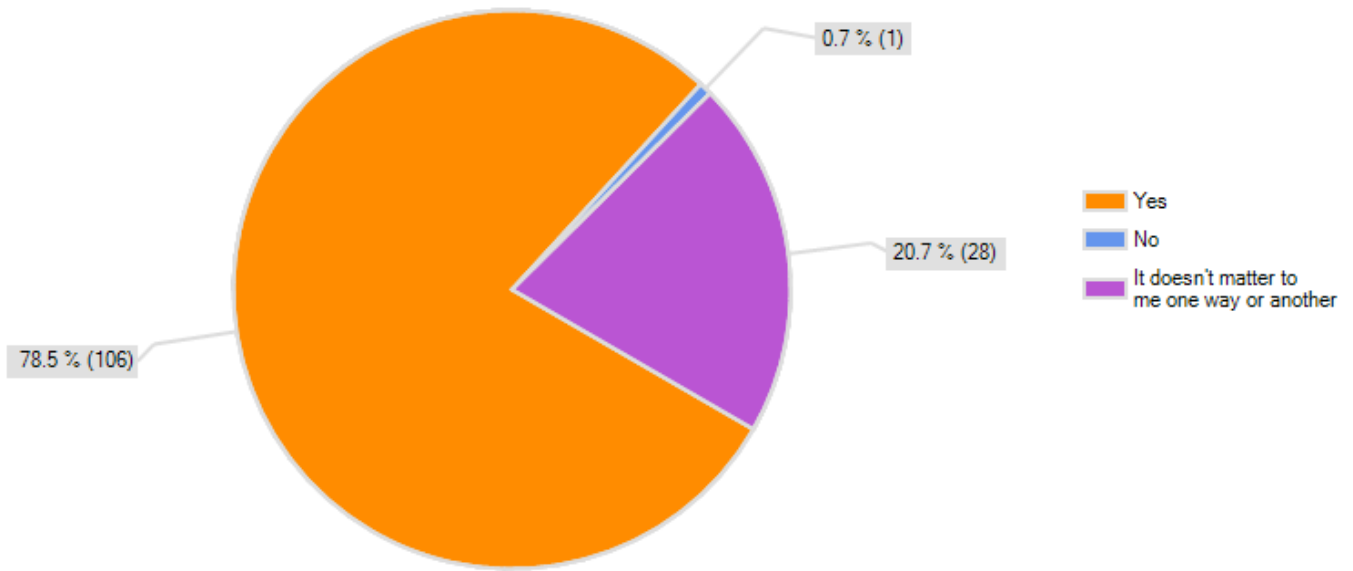
Do you find the tweets informative and/or useful? Of the persons following SanJoseTrails on Twitter, 96.6% reported finding the tweets informative and/or useful.

Do you find the tweets informative and/or useful?



Do you wish to see public information efforts continue? 78.5% reported wishing to see the current outreach efforts (via Twitter and other means) to continue.

Do you wish to see public information efforts continue?



Remaining Survey Questions

The survey asked several questions on behalf of the Save Our Trails advocacy organization and corporate bike coordinators. That data supports outreach efforts and is not detailed in this report. Staff can provide this data upon request.

Conclusion

Trail Count 2012 results show a continued increase in trail usage within the Trail Network. The Guadalupe River Trail station at Coleman Avenue has been used for the past 6 years of the Count and indicates a 3.4% increase in usage. This is the 6th consecutive increase in trail usages and is somewhat surprising since the Lower Guadalupe River Trail is closed about 1 mile north for a paving project.

A dramatic 34.5% increase has been measured at the San Fernando Street station and may indicate that usage is influenced by high gas prices, a desire for exercise, convenience compared to other options, or consistent with national trails that indicate an increase in cycling. The change in count location from Park Avenue to San Fernando Street was expected to result in a decrease in use because staff believed that double-counting has occurred in the past. The new count station measures the same corridor but in a location that reduces counter confusion.

San Jose's efforts to increase trail mileage and on-street bikeways may also be a factor that supports more trail usage. Recent bikelane projects in the downtown core may be encouraging people to consider bicycling or increasing their level of comfort.

Acknowledgement

Trails Program staff would like to thank the organizations and volunteers that helped to make Trail Count 2012 a successful event; including Guadalupe River Park Conservancy, Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition, Save Our Trails and the Five Wounds Community / Communiversity.