

Annual Count and Survey of San José Trail Users



Trail Count 2014

SUMMARY REPORT



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Executive Summary

Trail Count is an annual count and survey conducted on San José's off-street trails. This event gathers valuable data that supports improved planning, design and grant-writing efforts. It also provides strong evidence of the value of trails as part of the city's balanced transportation system, as a large number of users are commuting to and from employment on a daily basis.

Trail Count 2014 was conducted on Wednesday, September 24, 2014. Eight count stations were established to measure usage along four 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 2015 are explored in greater detail as part of this report.

Significant Increase in Usage:

- **+51%** at Guadalupe River Trail (Coleman Avenue)
- **+39%** at Guadalupe River Trail (San Fernando Street)

Trail users report that trails are high quality, they feel safe, and like routes with no vehicles.

Sustained Usage: For 8 years in a row, Trail Count has documented significant annual increases in trail usage. Stations along the Guadalupe River have documented between 40 and 50% increases over the prior year.



Trail improvements draw more users: 51% of respondents were using the Guadalupe River Trail more frequently because of the 6.4-mile paving project.

Trails are a Preferred Transportation Option: Users cite opportunity for exercise, saving money and helping the environment as motivating factors.

Background

Purpose

Trail Count was initiated in 2007 primarily as a possible advocacy tool in reducing the number of special event closures along the downtown trails. There was usage data to share with decision-makers on the impact and detrimental impact of frequent spring and summer closures in Discovery Meadow as well as large-scale and prolonged construction projects (Highway 87 repairs) that required long-term trail closures.

Data from Trail Count 2007 supported development of a formal Trail Closure Policy to minimize the number and duration of closures. When closures were not available, the policy guided the posting of early notification at the trail and on the City's website, as well as detour signage consistent with a roadway closure.

Over the years, Trail Count's objectives have expanded to support the pursuit of grant funding, improve planning and design, document the value of trails as a transportation resource, and sustain awareness of the trails as a great City of San José recreational resource. The use of an on-line survey conducted for a week at the time of Trail Count has helped to quantify the number of daily trail users, how the individual trail systems are being used, user perceptions, and year-to-year changes in trail usage.

Data gathered from Trail Count makes the City more competitive for limited grant funding. Over \$700,000 in new grant funding was secured from grants during Fiscal Year 2013-14. A coalition of ABAG, Bay Area Ridge Trail and the Coastal Conservancy teamed with San José for a North San José Climate Change grant (\$60,000) because the City had long-term and significant data on trail usage tied to transportation.

Grant applications commonly ask for usage and other data which is only available by conducting Trail Count.

Partnership

Trail Count relies heavily on volunteers to count trail users and distribute survey cards. **City of San José Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services** manages the event and volunteer recruitment. Volunteer support for Trail Count 2014 came from individuals, organizations and companies. The following entities have been long time supporters of Trail Count:

- **Guadalupe River Park Conservancy** managed and staffed the Coleman Avenue count station.
- **Save our Trails** managed and staffed the Three Creeks Trail count station.
- **Five Wounds Neighborhood / Communiversity** managed and staffed the Five Wounds Corridor count station.

- **CH2M-Hill** increased volunteer capacity at the River Oaks Bridge Count Station so a full 12-hour count could occur (previously, this station had AM and PM Peak counts only).
- **Callander Associates** staffed the Guadalupe River Trail San Fernando Station during several shifts.

Analysis

Planning Process

The 2014 count was held on September 24. September was selected because school is in session, weather is mild with rain unlikely and daylight hours extend past 6:00 PM. Additionally, a number of grant applications are due late in the year making data timely, and the month is recommended by the [National Pedestrian and Bicycle Documentation project](#) which seeks to standardize and increase the number of pedestrian and bicycle counts occurring across the country.

A 12-hour count at all stations is highly desirable. However, volunteer resources are limited. Because of this, Peak Hour counts (7:00-9:00 AM and 4:00-6:00 PM) were used at some count 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. All other stations participated in a full 12-hour count cycle.

Data Collection Method

Trail Count 2014 Volunteers were provided with the following tools to assist in counting:

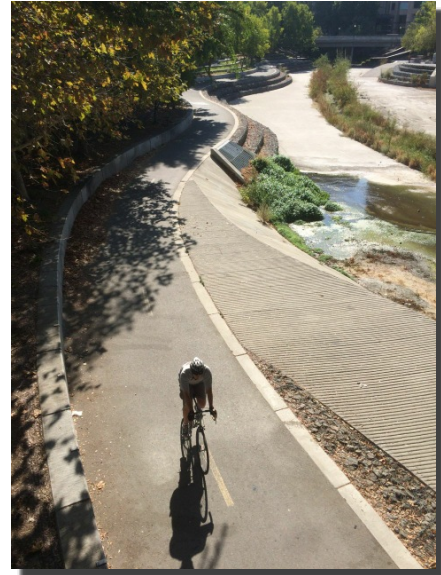
- **Instructions:** Counting directions were provided to all volunteers. Volunteers were asked to arrive at their count stations 15 minutes in advance and to fax/email the completed sheet at the end of their shift.
- **Count Sheet:** Trail Count volunteers kept a handwritten tally of trail users. The counting sheet was customized for 12-Hour and Peak-Hour counts depending on the station location. The sheet provided space to count the type of trail users (bike/ped/other) and record their direction of travel. The survey included a “notes” field so counters could denote users like equestrians, Segway-users, etc. or any unusual conditions that may have impacted the count (ie. “a large *track and field* group increased the count”).
- **Survey Postcard:** A postcard announcing the opportunity to participate in the online trail count survey was offered to trail users at all count stations. The card provided both a QR code and a web link guiding individuals to the survey and requesting participation by Sunday, September 28th.



Count Stations

Eight count stations were established in this year's Trail Count. These stations are described below:

1. **Guadalupe River Trail at Coleman Avenue (12-hour count):** Located north of downtown San José where many people enjoy the 120-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 (12-hour count):** Centrally located in Downtown San José. It is directly adjacent to Adobe Systems' headquarter building and other large downtown employers.
3. **Guadalupe River Trail at River Oaks Bridge (12-hour count):** Located in North San José, at the terminus of River Oaks Parkway next to the VTA headquarters. Counts were conducted at this location for the first time in 2013 (AM and PM peak-hour only), and counts were expanded to 12-hour this year.
4. **Los Gatos Creek at Auzerais Avenue (Peak Hour count):** Located in the mid-town area, this reach of the trail system links mid-town to Willow Glen by way of Lonus Street. Auzerais Ave 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 (12-hour count):** Located near the San José / Campbell border. 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.
6. **Los Alamitos Creek Trail near Camden Avenue (12-hour count):** Located in south San José. 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.
7. **Five Wounds Corridor at William Street (Peak Hour count):** Located in the eastern edge of downtown. Peak hour counts were conducted along the future Five Wounds Trail. This location was a shift from the



Story Road location in 2013. 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 and fluctuations in usage between various points of access. Because the station location has changed, the increase in travel is not combined with other count station findings.

- 8. **Three Creeks Trail at Willow Street (Peak Hour count):** Located in the Willow Glen neighborhood, west of Downtown. This 0.9 mile trail located in San José's Willow Glen neighborhood was opened to the public in an interim state in 2013. This is the second year that counts have been conducted at this location. Past data from this station was used in the successful pursuit of a \$1,000,000 Urban Greening Grant in 2014 from the State of California for paving and landscaping of the trail system.



Numerical Findings (by Individual Trail Count Station)

A total of 6,920 trail users were counted this year. This is about 1,700 more persons than counted on San José trails in 2013. The table includes past count data for stations with 12 hour counts.

Count Location	2011	2012	2013	2014	Change ('13 to '14)
Guadalupe River Trail at Coleman Avenue	593	613	719	1083	+51%
Guadalupe River Trail at San Fernando Street	657	---	899	1253	+39%
Los Gatos Creek at Hamilton Avenue	1033	1177	1217	1437	+18%
Los Gatos Creek at Auzerais Avenue	157	157	157	169	+8%
Los Alamitos Creek near Camden Avenue	843	897	968	765	-21%
Three Creeks at Willow Street	---	---	45	54	+20%

The following stations do not show "change" data because the counting period or location changed from 2013 to 2014					
Guadalupe River Trail at River Oaks Bridge	---	---	1125 (peak)	1790 (12-hr)	---
Five Wounds Corridor at William Street	---	82	83 (at Story Rd)	369	---

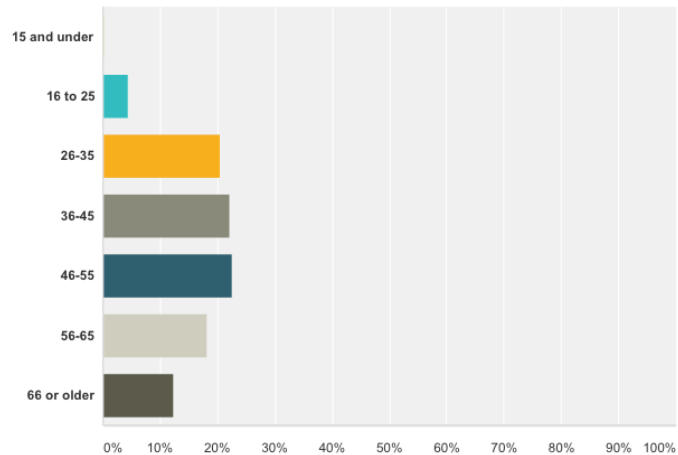
Increase in use was documented at all count stations with the exception of the Los Alamitos Creek station. There were no special conditions noted in count sheets that might explain this decline. This trail system does appear to serve more recreational users (by visual observation and time of day usage), so it may be more subject to shifts than trails that have a large share of regular "commute" users.

Survey Questions and Findings

The on-line survey collected data from September 24 to 28, 2014. There were 392 responses received, a 170% increase from the 145 respondents in 2013. The survey included multiple choice questions and opportunities for respondents to provide input and comments. The primary responses, graphs and observations are noted.

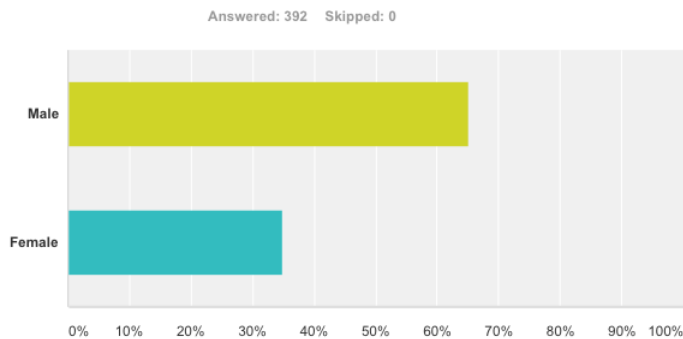
Q1: What is your age?

The majority of trail users are between 36 and 55 years of age (about 43%). From the graph below, there was a generally even distribution of ages amongst adults responding to the survey. No children younger than 16 responded to the survey. The survey was occurred on a weekday which likely limited use by children. A weekend count would likely count children as part of family outings.



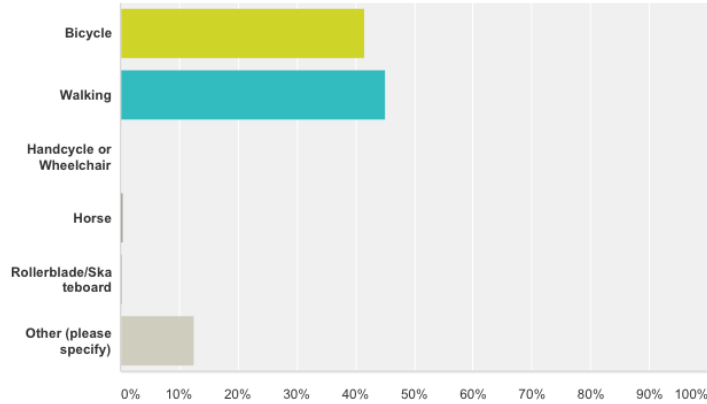
Q2: What is your gender?

As is consistent with national trends for trail use, we found the majority of trail users were male. Similar to last year’s survey (37% in 2013), about a third (34.95%) responded as female . In the U.S. overall, 24% of all bicycle trips are made by women. (U.S. Department of Transportation *2009 National Household Travel Survey*).



Q3: What was your primary mode of transportation on the trail today?

Trails are used primary by pedestrians and bicyclists. Over 41% reported using a bicycle, and over 57% were walking. The table below shows 45.15% walking. The use of the term “walking” inadvertently responding as “other” if they were running or jogging. The use of terms will be clarified as part of next year’s survey. One person responded use of a horse. One person responded use of roller skates. One person responded use of a car, which they may have intended to report as the mode used to access the trail.

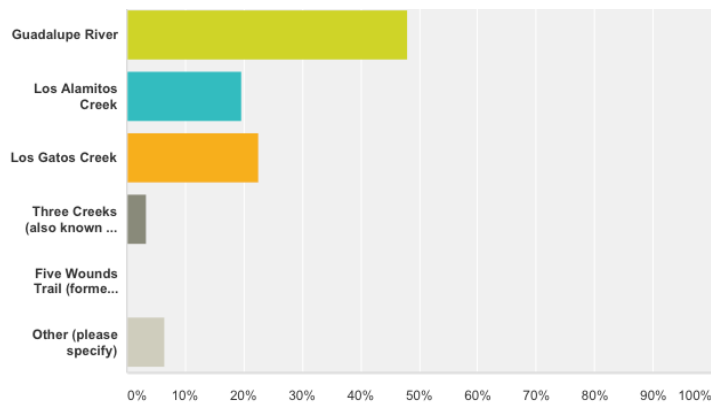


Q5. As an equestrian user, how can San José Trails better serve you?

This question only appeared to the one equestrian responder. The availability of the survey occurred through postcards given to trail users and was promoted via social media. The responder indicated a use of the County facilities and did not indicate use of a City of San José trail. From the response, the City should consider provision of clean water and groomed trails. Groomed trails would apply to the City’s rural trails as found at Alum Rock Park. This information was conveyed to the Park Manager at park.

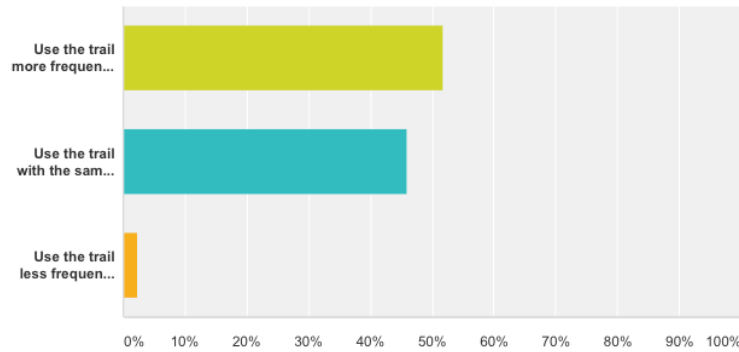
Q6. Which trail did you spend the most time on today?

The responses to this question generally reflect the number of users found along each of the trails counted.



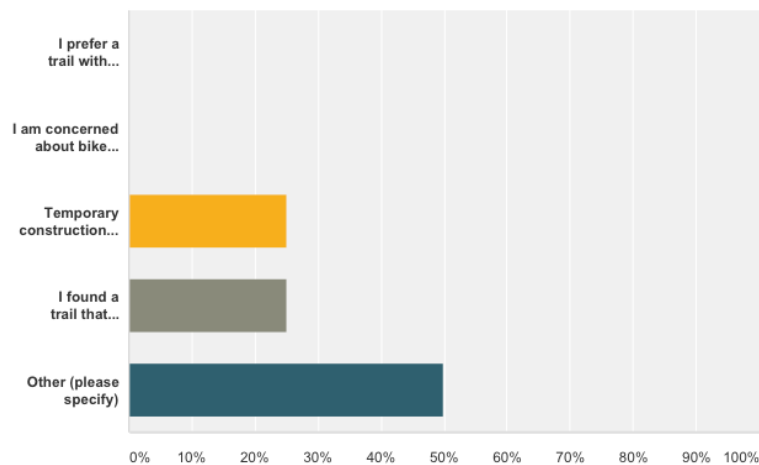
Q7: Has the recent paving of the Lower Guadalupe River Trail from Gold Street to Highway 880 changed your usage?

A: A majority of users (51.57%) responded using the project more frequently since the 6.4-mile paving project was completed. A small percentage (2.39%; 5 persons) responded less usage. The balance of respondents stated that the paving had not impacted their rate of usage.



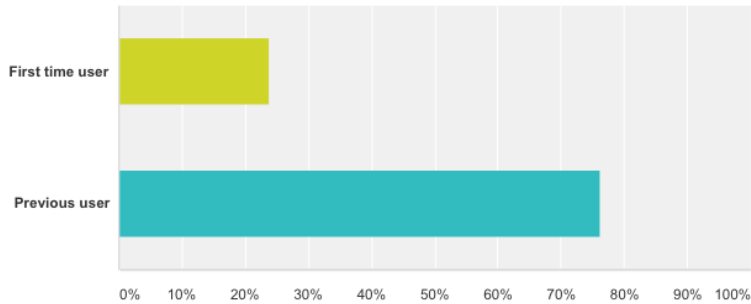
Q8: If you use the Guadalupe River Trail less now than before the paving, why so?

Greater usage was an anticipated outcome of the pavement project, but we wanted to understand how pavement might deter some. Three persons provided input that the temporary construction closures had reduced their use, they preferred a softer surface for running, and didn't want to deal with the higher usage and bike riders.



Q9: Did the paving encourage you to use the (Guadalupe River) trail for the first time or were you already using the trail prior to paving?

We asked this question to determine if a large-scale paving project has a positive influence and draws new users. 23.74% responded being first time users since the pavement project.



Q10. What currently motivates you to use the trail on a regular basis? If you do not use it daily, what changes would motivate you to use it more often?

This question was responded to by 173 survey takers and a wide range of opinions were offered. Some major themes were:

- Nice trail (no cars, safety)
- Fitness, exercise, health
- Smooth paved surface
- Well maintained
- Long distance and off-street commute route
- Opportunity to “escape” from city/urban environment

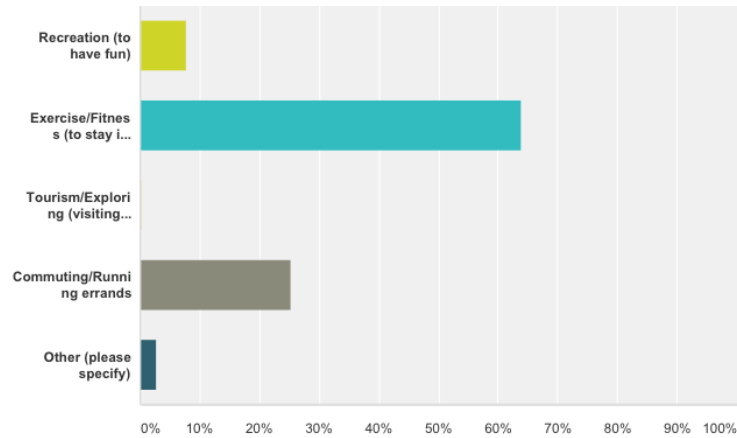
Responders suggested that they would use the trail further if:

- More east-west trail connections
- Linkage to the Los Gatos Creek Trail
- Better maintenance (downtown section, glass on trail reported)

Q11. What’s your primary reason for using San José trails?

Almost 64% of total respondents said that exercise and health was the primary motivating reason. About 25% reported commuting to and from work.

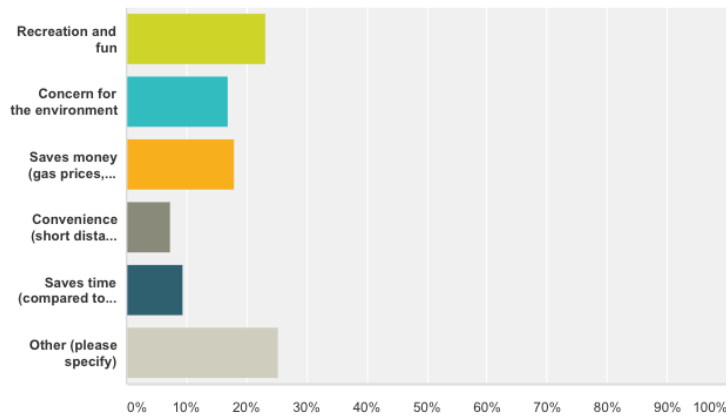
The Guadalupe River Trail travels along Downtown San José and many Silicon Valley employers in north San José. A sort of the survey responses found that **37% of Guadalupe River Trail users were commuting**. This is more than the overall average from all count stations, but a large decline from the 50-55% reported in past years for Guadalupe River Trail commuting.



Q12. What encourages you to use the trail instead of a car, bus, etc.?

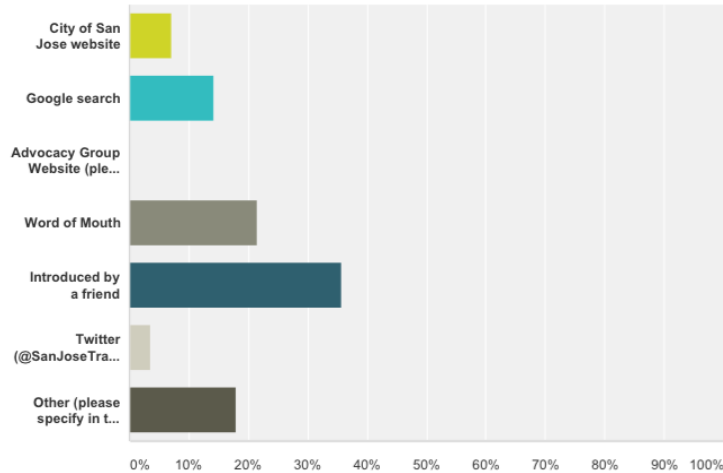
About a quarter of respondents stated the pursuit of recreation and fun as a primary motivator. Others reported the desire to save money on car-related expenses and a concern for the environment.

Over 16% reported that use of the trail saved them time or was most convenient.



Q13. How did you learn about the trail you used today?

Most people report learning of the trail through friends (35.71%) and word of mouth (21.43%). The remaining 25% used the City’s website or social media.



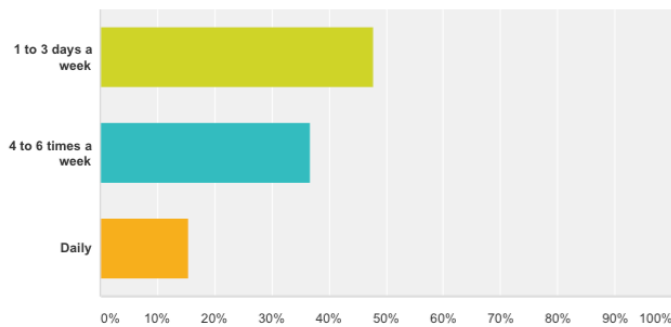
Q14. What was your general impression of the trail?

This question provided the opportunity for direct feedback. Many comments were positive. Some common themes were:

Positives		Negatives
Well maintained	Good surface	Lots of bikes
Good signage	Views / nature	Pavement not good for runners

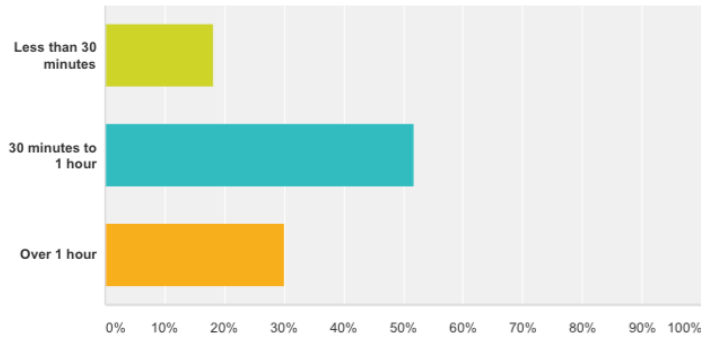
Q15. How often per month do you typically use the trail?

Almost half of responders use the trail 1 to 3 times per week. Over a third find themselves on the trails 4 to 6 times per week. 15% of trail users visit the trail daily.



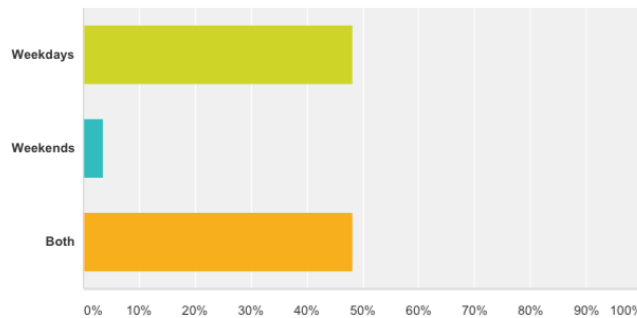
Q16. How much time do you usually spend on the trail?

Over half of trail users spend 30 minutes to 1 hour per visit.



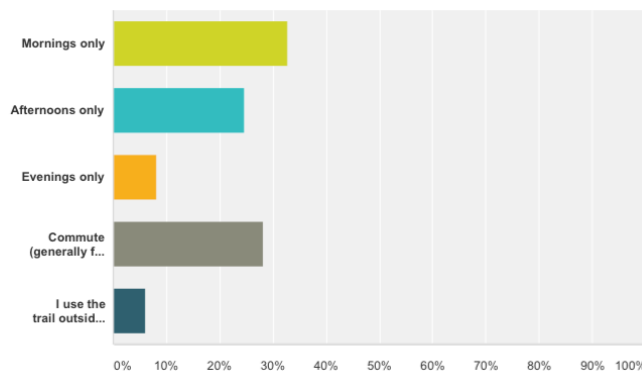
Q17. What days do you usually use the trail?

The count occurred on a weekday so it was expected that most respondents would report weekday use. Forty-eight percent reported weekday use. The same percentage reported using the trails on both days and weekends.



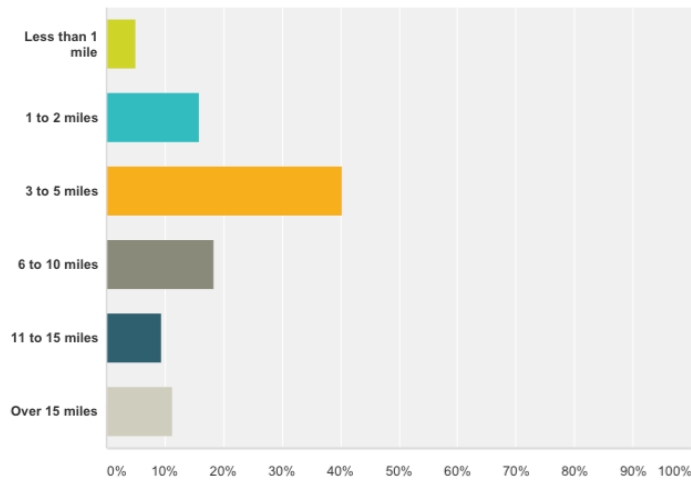
Q18. At what times do you generally use the trail?

The trails are used throughout the day, with few reporting use during hours beyond the posted hours of operations (after dark).



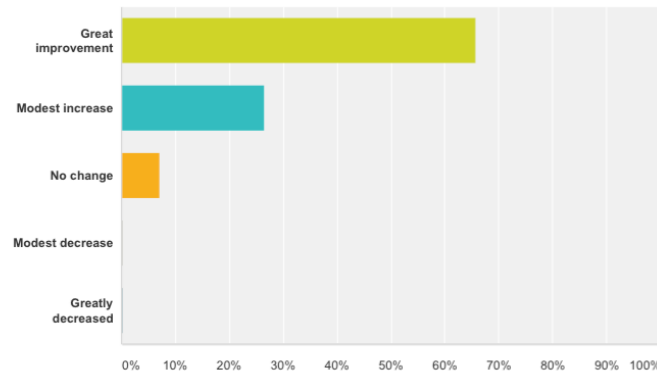
Q19. What was your estimated roundtrip mileage on the trail today (excluding on-street travel)?

Forty percent of users travelled between 3 to 5 miles. Over 20% travelled over 20 miles round trip.



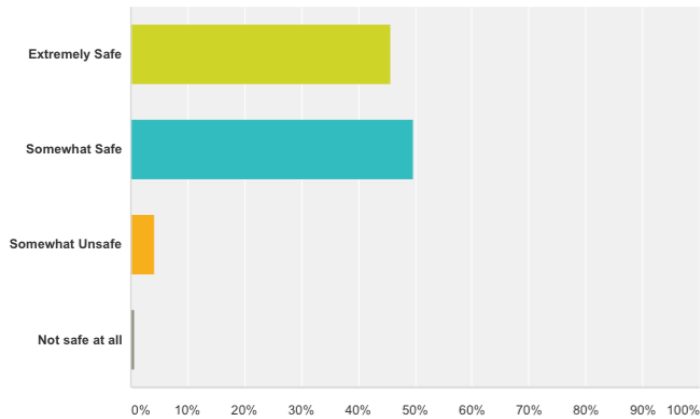
Q20. How has the availability of trails in San José affected your quality of life and fitness level?

Sixty-five percent reported great improvement. Less than 10% reported no change.



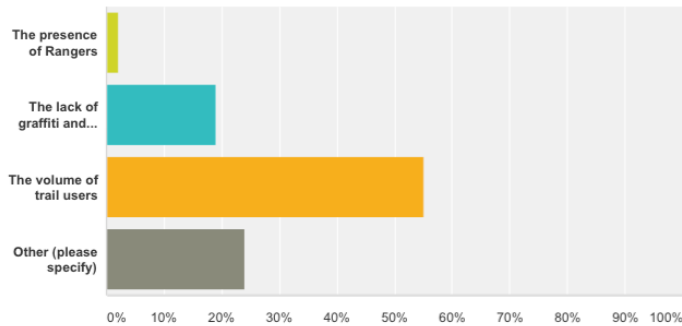
Q21. How safe do you feel on the trails?

Similar to past surveys, 95% of persons using the trails feel safe on the trails.



Q22. What is your self-assessment of safety based upon?

The high usage of the trail and its clean appearance convey a sense of safety.

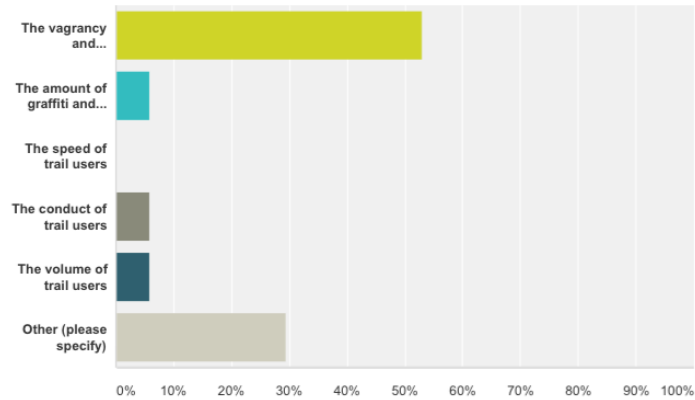


Q23. Per persons responding negatively about safety, we asked trail users what affected their sense of not feeling safe.

Almost 53% reported that vagrants made them feel less safe. Graffiti and conduct of other trail users accounted for 10%. About 5% of trail users felt unsafe by the number of trail users. Persons that offered input suggested that lack of lighting, a meandering design, and potential wildlife raised concerns.

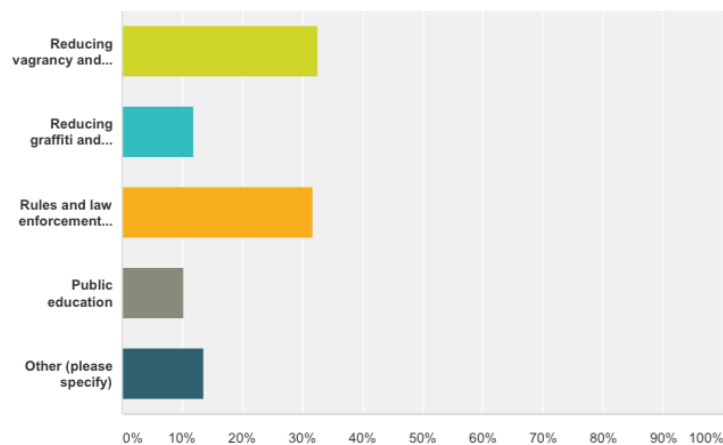
Q24. The City and Santa Clara Valley Water District have jointly funded the hiring of more Park Rangers. We asked trail users, “Have you seen rangers on the trail?”

Almost 80% responded that they felt safer by the sight of rangers.



Q25. What should be the primary focus of the rangers?

Trail users responded that rangers should spend 33% of time on efforts to reduce vagrancy and loitering, about 12% to reduce graffiti, and 32% on rules enforcement.



Q26. Are you a visitor to San José?

Five percent of respondents (19 persons) said that they were visiting. This is much higher than the 1 person who responded to the question last year.

Q27. Was the trail the primary reason for your visit?

Twenty percent of respondents came to San José for the trail.

Q28. Did you experience art, history or culture along the trail?

Twenty-five percent reported experiencing cultural elements along the trail. San José’s largest public art piece, “Hands” is installed along the San José Airport garage and is highly visible from the trail. Five interpretive stations were installed along the Lower Guadalupe River Trail as part of the paving project.

Q29 Would you recommend the trail to others as a reason to visit San José?

Twenty persons answered this final question and 15 said that the trail was a reason to visit.

Conclusion

Trail Count 2014 results show a continued increase in trail usage within the overall City of San José Trail Network. As an example, the Guadalupe River Trail station at Coleman Avenue (*graph*) has been counted for the past 8 years, and saw a 51% increase in usage in 2014. Trail users report the quality of trail surfacing, no vehicular traffic and access to recreation and motivating factors for their use.

Acknowledgement

Trails Program staff would like to thank the organizations and volunteers that helped to make Trail Count 2014 a successful event; including Guadalupe River Park Conservancy, Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition, Save Our Trails, Five Wounds Community / Communiversity, CH2M Hill Engineers, Inc. and Callander Associates.

