



INTERCITY BUS & RAIL TRAVEL STUDY

Overview

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TPB Travel Forecasting Subcommittee
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Why Study Intercity Travel?



Federal requirement for MPO regional planning



Potential overlap with commuter transit



Support equity due to affordability and access to long-distance travel options



Offer travel options for rural and small urban areas



Economic impact due to tourism and business travel



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Previous TPB Studies

2016 Study of Intercity Bus Traffic and Patronage in the Metropolitan Washington Region

- First effort to collect information on intercity bus ridership, where travelers board and alight, and origins and destinations outside of the region.

June 2023 – TPB briefing on Intercity Bus and Rail Travel

- Summary of available information on intercity services and ridership.



October 2023 – TPB Work Session on Intercity Rail and Bus Travel

- Representatives from Amtrak, Union Station Redevelopment Corporation (USRC), American Bus Association (ABA), Maryland Transit Administration (MTA), and the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority (VPRA) provided updates to the board on projects and plans.

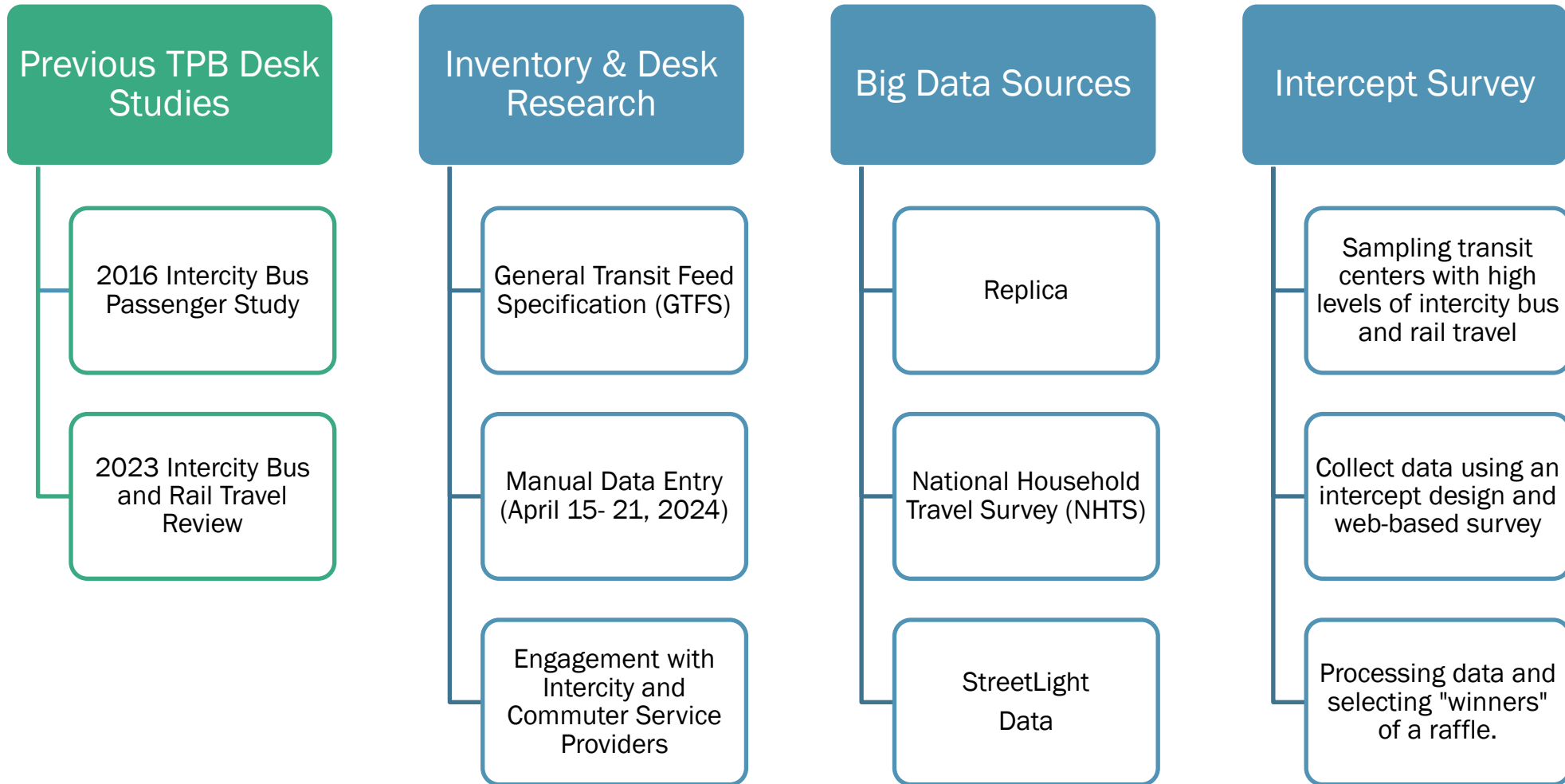
<https://www.mwcog.org/documents/2017/01/18/intercity-bus-traffic-and-patronage-in-the-metropolitan-washington-region-bus/>

<https://www.mwcog.org/events/2023/6/21/transportation-planning-board/> (Agenda Item 8)

<https://www.mwcog.org/newsroom/2023/11/14/intercity-rail-and-bus-experts/>



Study Scope



Highlights from Study



Image credit: MWCOG

Amtrak ridership is nearing pre-pandemic levels with over 4.5 million trips in FY 2023, while intercity bus ridership is recovering more slowly at over 1 million trips.

The top origin-destination pairs are NCR - New York for both Amtrak (62 average daily train trips) and intercity bus (214 average daily bus trips).

Union Station in Washington, DC, is the busiest intercity stop, with 77 daily train trips and 171 daily bus trips.

Amtrak averages 173 daily train arrivals at different stops in the region, followed by FlixBus with 60 daily bus trips.

Income and ethnicity/race strongly correlate with the choice of intercity bus and rail travel options.

Personal or leisure was the top reason for intercity trips, followed by visits to family and friends. Work/business-related travel represents a smaller share of intercity trips.



Intercity Bus & Rail Network Snapshot



Intercity Transit Major Corridors and Destinations



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Links Over 50 Cities Across 21 States

- Mostly Northeast Corridor

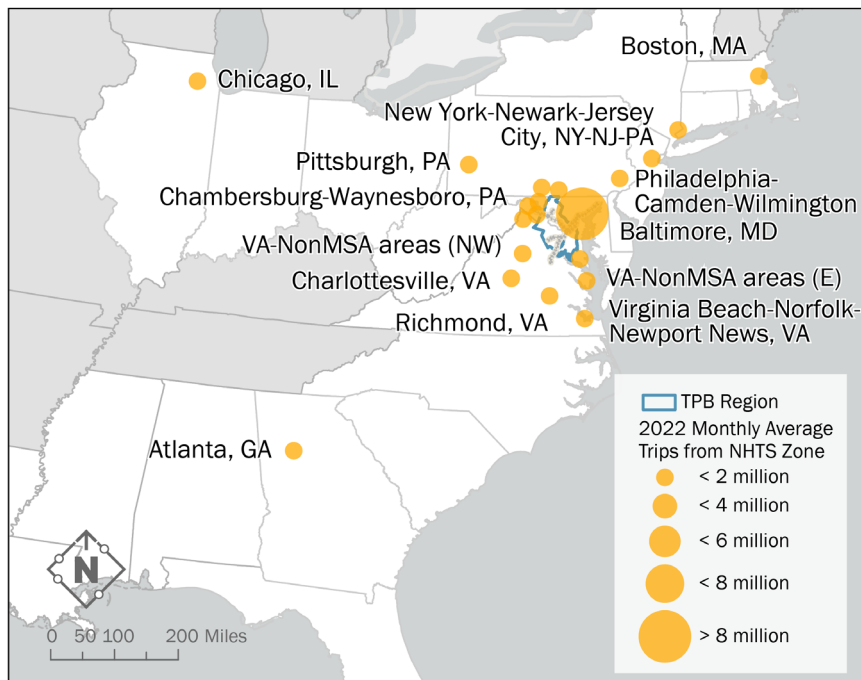
Service Providers

- 1 Intercity Rail
- 13 Intercity Bus
- 3 Commuter Bus
- 2 Commuter Rail

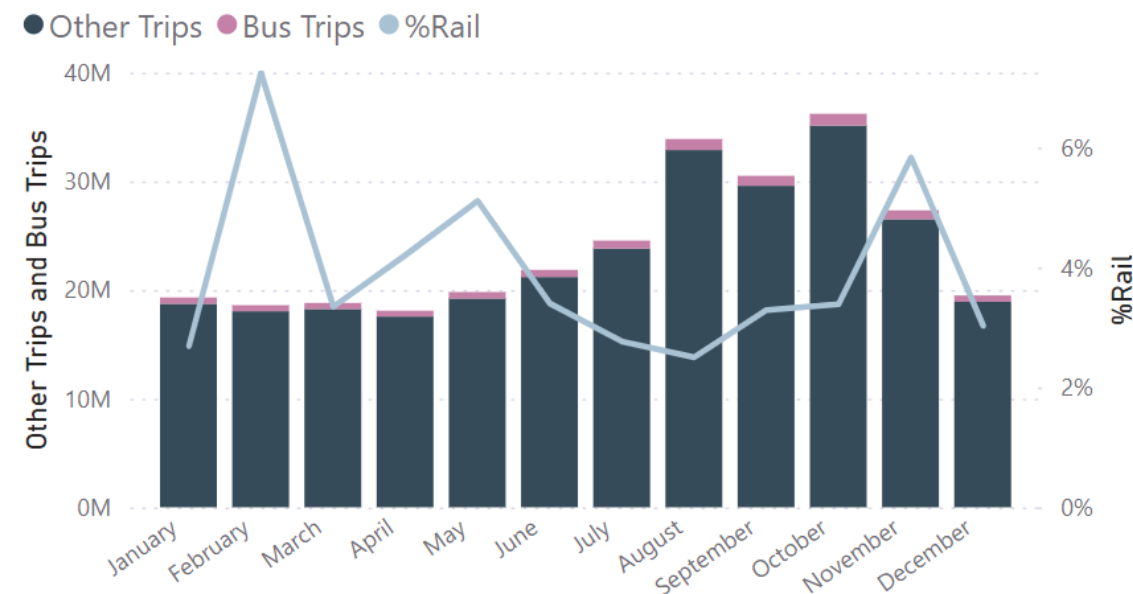
Recent or Future Service Changes

- Megabus Bankruptcy
- Virginia Breeze Expansion

Trip Volume: 2022 NHTS NextGen OD



Average Monthly Trip Volumes by Origin Zone



Monthly Travel Trends to the NCR

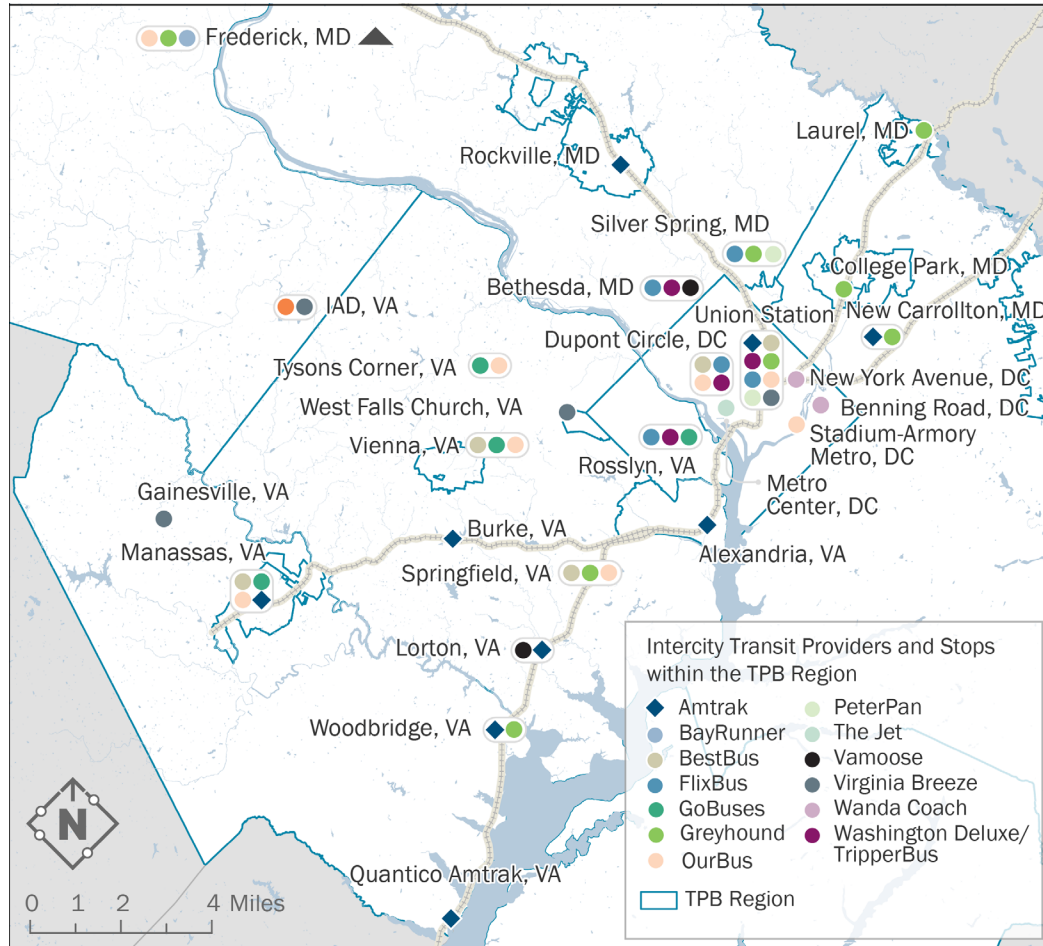
Key Findings

- The largest number of trips to the TPB region start and end in zones in the neighboring states of Virginia and Maryland.
- Many of the same zones are present in origin and destination, indicating a strong bidirectional travel in these regions.
- Trip volumes overall increase during the fall. Rail trips peak in February, with smaller peaks in May and November.

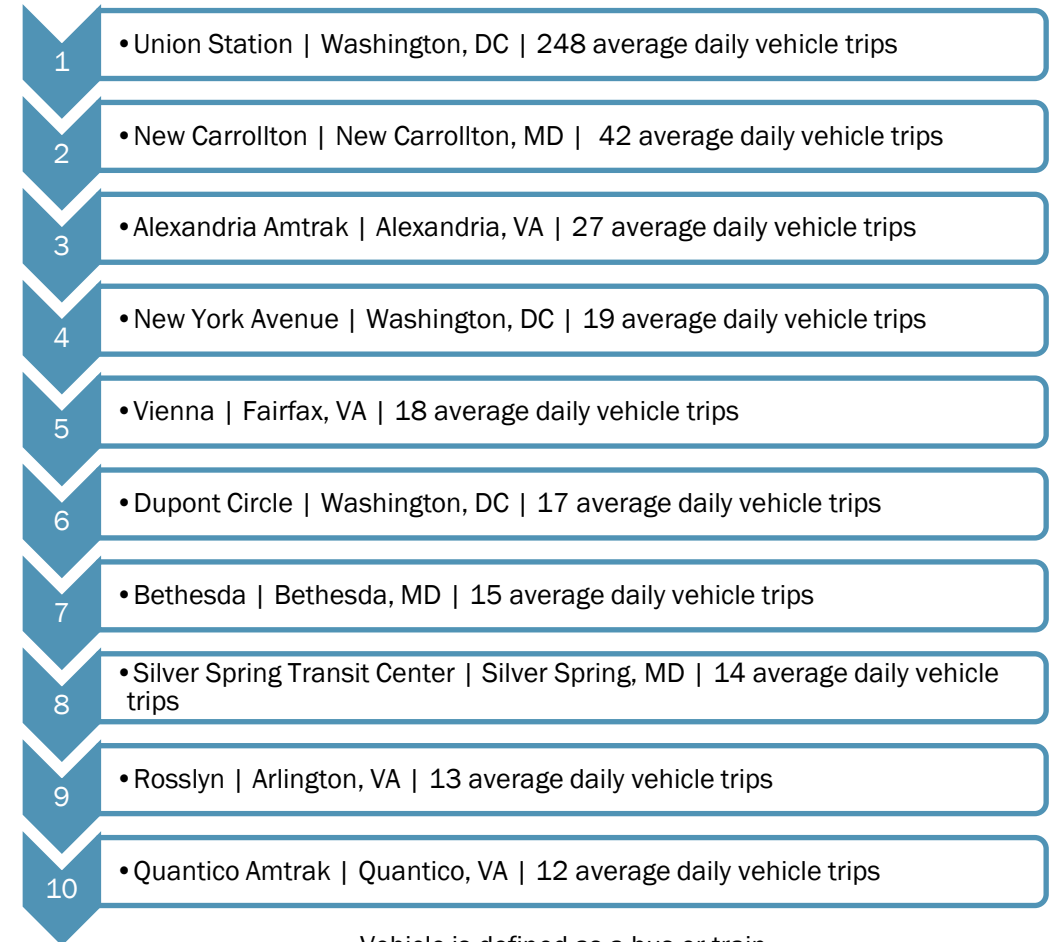


NCR Intercity Travel Stops

31 Intercity Stops Within the NCR



Top Intercity Stops



Vehicle is defined as a bus or train



Top Origins and Destinations

Amtrak

- 1 { NCR - New York (62 average daily train trips)
- 2 { NCR - Boston (56 average daily train trips)
- 3 { NCR - Norfolk (21 average daily train trips)
- 4 { NCR - Newport News (14 average daily train trips)
- 5 { NCR - Roanoke (11 average daily train trips)

Intercity Bus

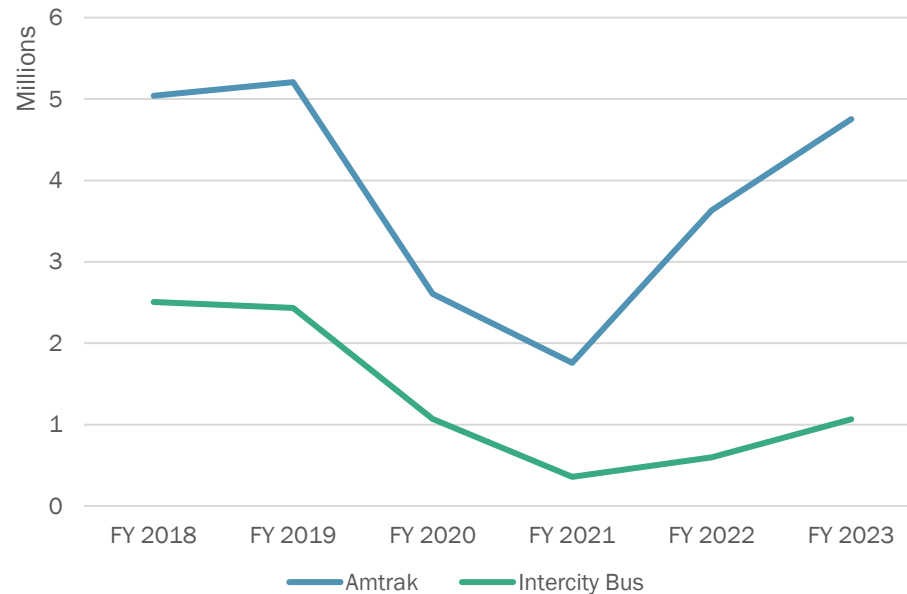
- 1 { NCR - New York (214 average daily bus trips)
- 2 { NCR - Atlanta (27 average daily bus trips)
- 3 { NCR - Richmond (12 average daily bus trips)
- 4 { NCR - Chicago (9 average daily bus trips)
- 5 { NCR - BWI (7 average daily bus trips)

Commuter Bus & Rail

- 1 { Baltimore Penn - Washington (MARC): 44 average daily train trips
- 2 { Gaithersburg - BWI Business Dist. (MTA Commuter Bus): 25 average daily bus trips
- 3 { Charlotte Hall/Waldorf - DC (MTA Commuter Bus): 24 average daily bus trips
- 4 { Annapolis - Washington DC (MTA Commuter Bus): 19 average daily bus trips
- 5 { Sunderland / Dunkirk - DC (MTA Commuter Bus): 19 average daily bus trips



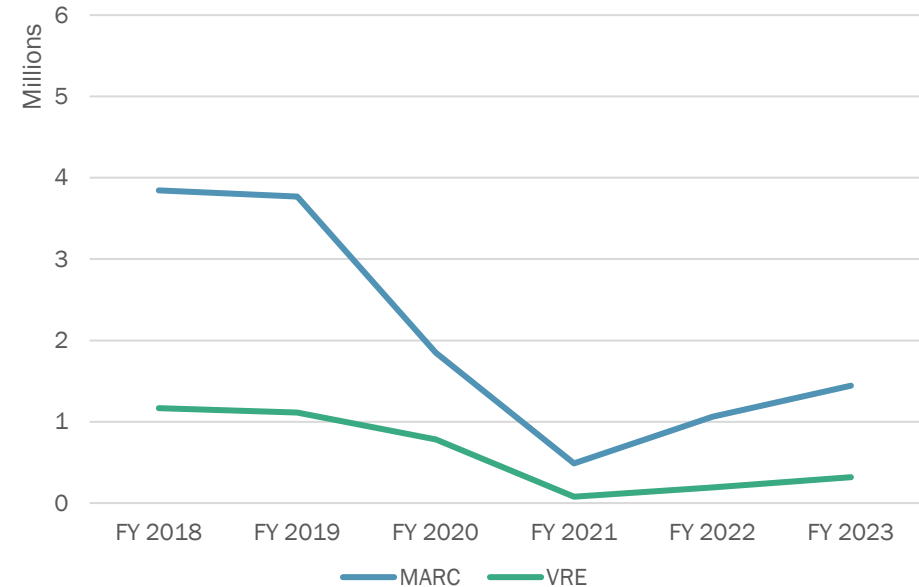
Ridership at Union Station



Intercity Service Ridership

Intercity Bus & Rail

- Amtrak is near its pre-pandemic highs
- Intercity bus ridership has been slower to recover



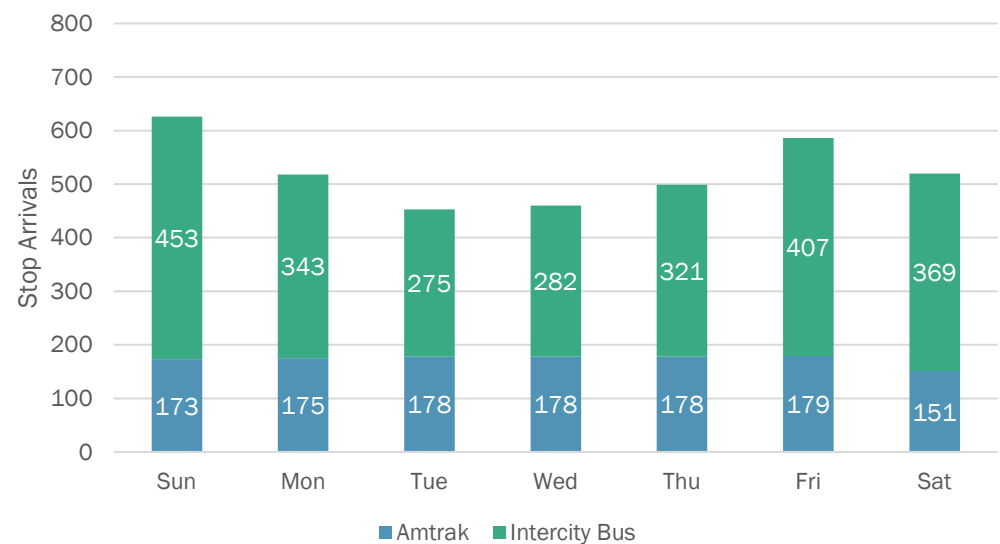
Commuter Service Ridership

Commuter Rail

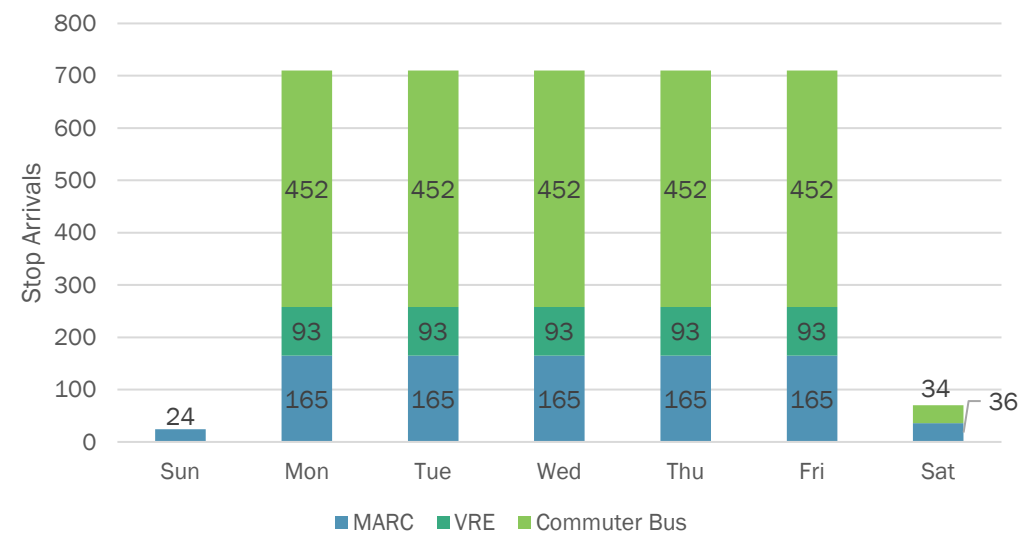
- Services have been slower to recover than Amtrak



Regional Trip Patterns



Daily Vehicle Trips – Amtrak & Intercity Bus



Daily Vehicle Trips – MARC, VRE & Commuter Bus

Holiday Week Stop Arrivals by Provider

Provider	Average Week	Memorial Day	July 4 th	Labor Day	Thanksgiving	Christmas
Amtrak	1,212	1,184	1,212	1,212	1,217	1,217
BayRunner	104	104	104	104	104	104
FlixBus	416	418	443	458	470	472
Greyhound	406	406	406	406	406	406
PeterPan	185	185	185	117	--	--

^[1] Virginia Breeze is excluded from this analysis as the GTFS feed is expired and does not line up with the holiday periods examined.

Intercept Survey - Methods



Image credit: MWCOG



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Location

- In-person intercept survey conducted primarily at major transit hubs throughout the National Capital Region, with a special focus on Union Station.

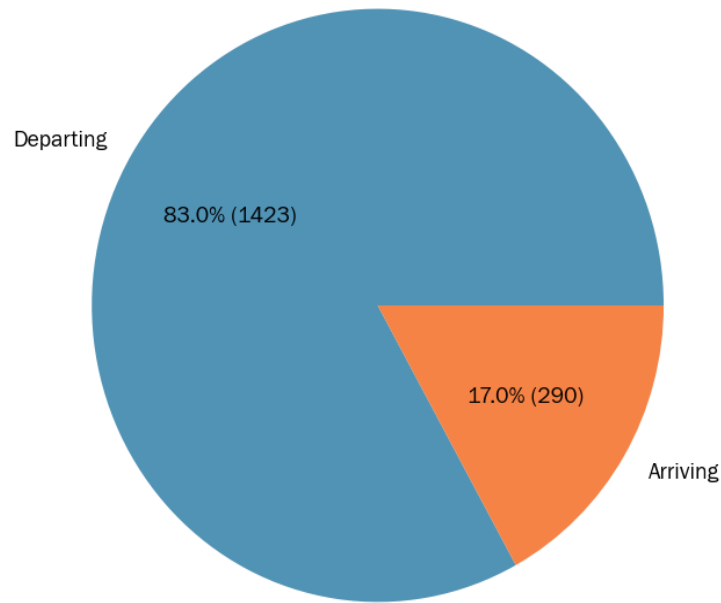
Survey Details

- 5-minute questionnaire about trip origin, destination and other details.
- Two options to take the survey:
 - Tablets handed out by interviewers
 - Postcards with QR codes
- All eligible respondents were entered into a raffle to win a \$100 Amazon gift codes.

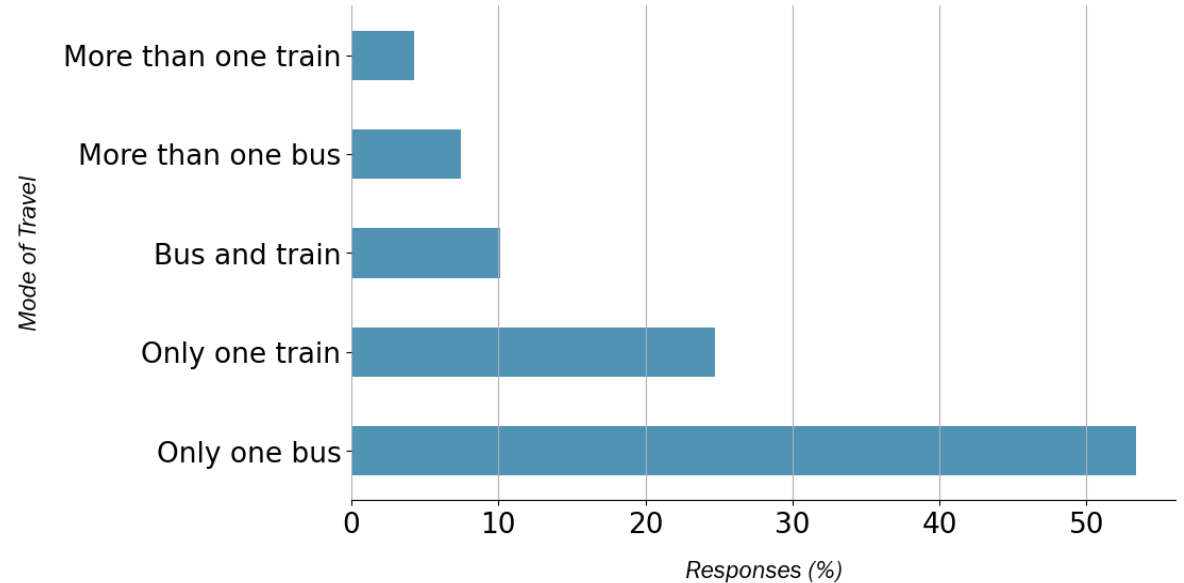
Timeline & Responses

- Fielded over four weeks in September and October 2024.
- Achieved a total of 1,708 completes.

Intercept Survey – Travel Direction & Mode



Travel Direction



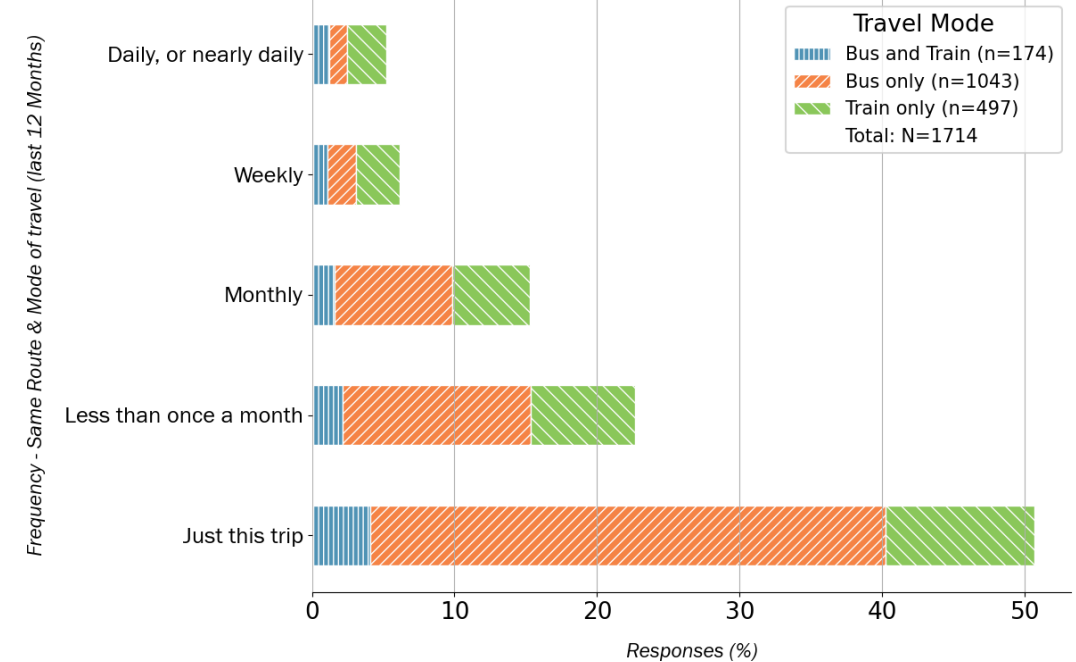
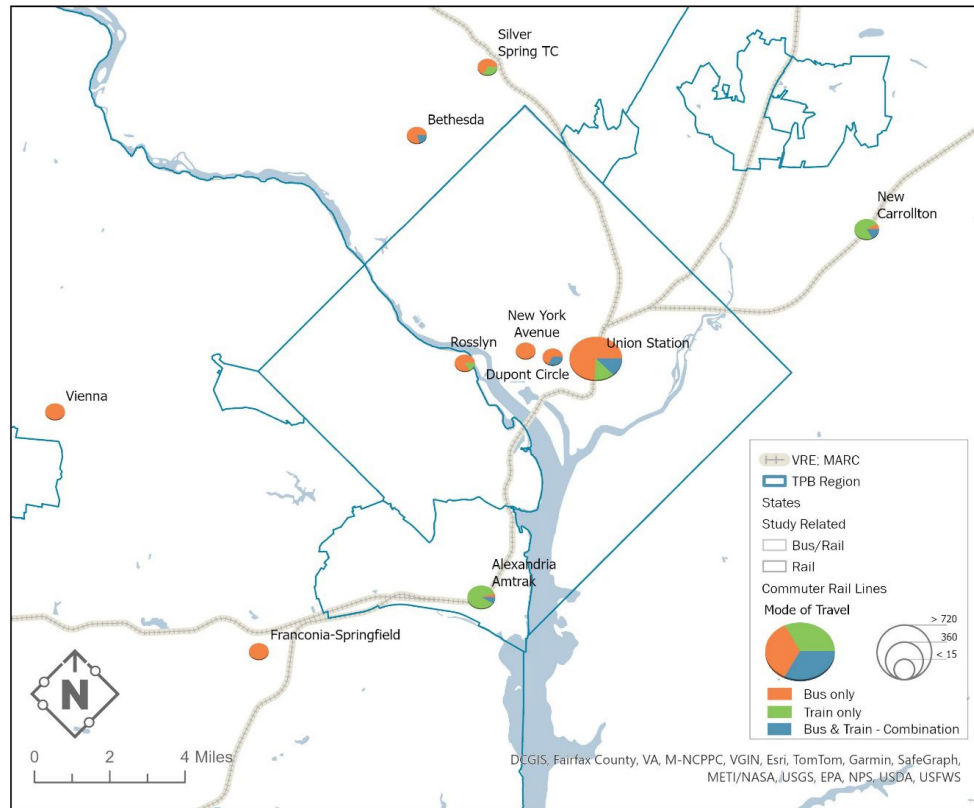
Mode Choice

Key Findings

- Of the participants, 83 percent completed the survey before leaving the D.C. region, while 17 percent completed it after arriving in the region.
- More than 50 percent reported using only one bus for their intercity travel, and around 25 percent reported using only one train.



Intercept Survey – Stations & Frequency of Travel



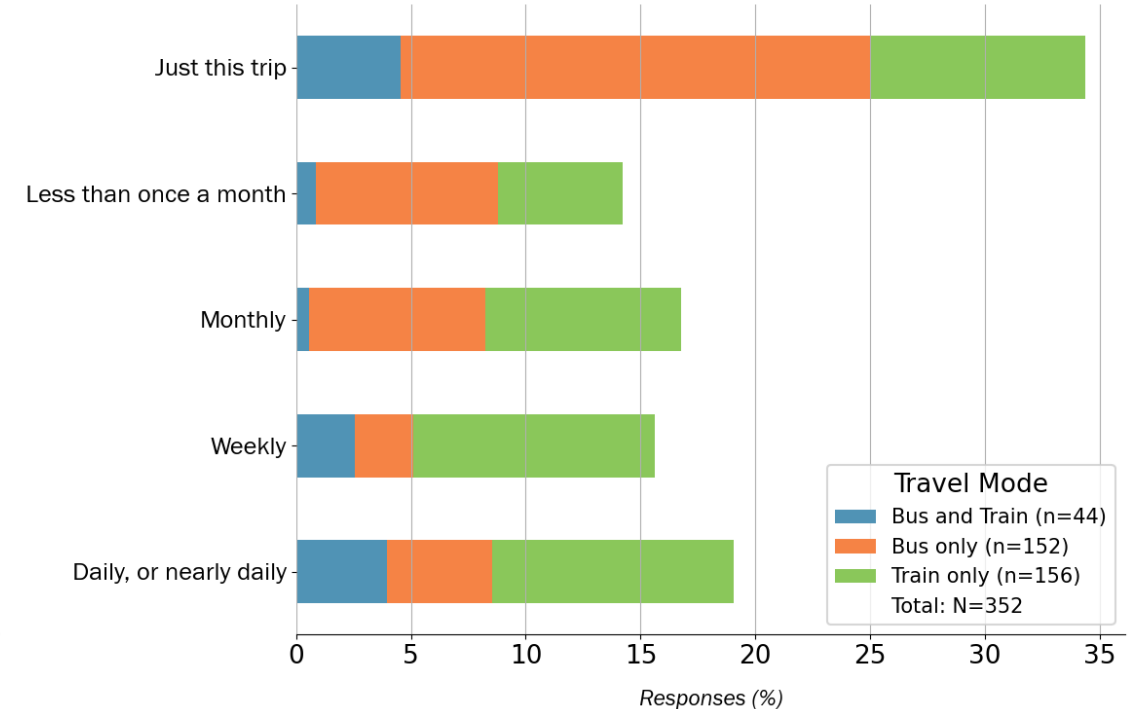
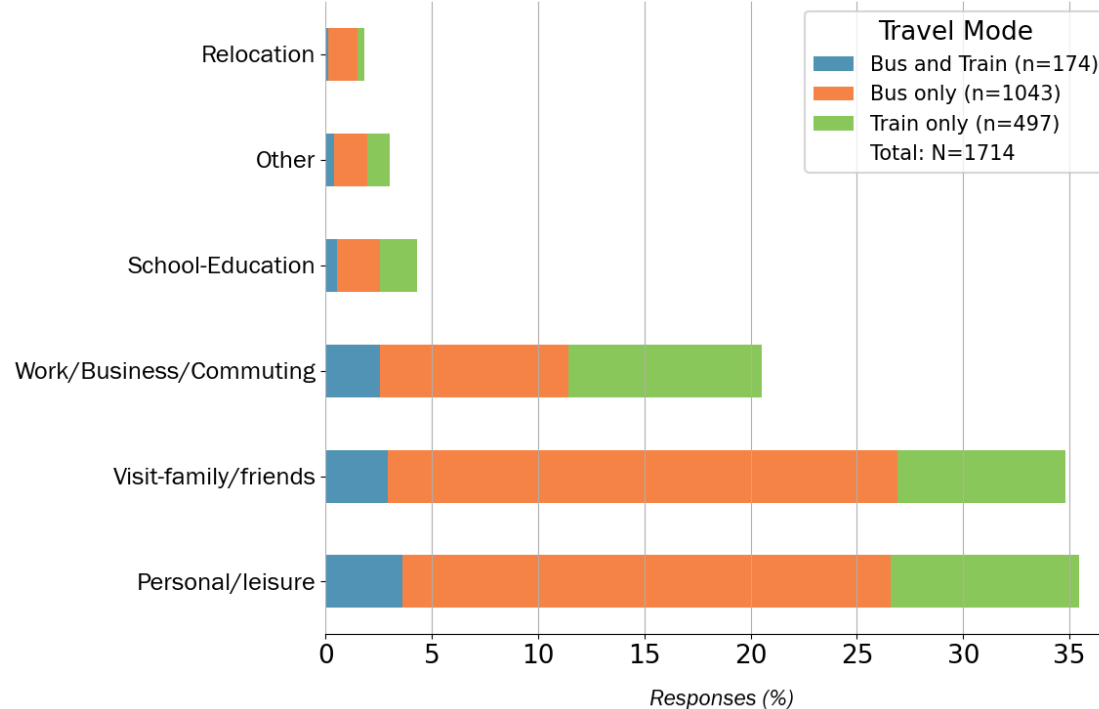
Frequency of Travel

Key Findings

- Over 70% of responses were recorded at Union Station, mainly indicating bus travel.
- More than half of respondents said this was their only intercity trip, with bus travelers being the majority.



Intercept Survey – Travel Purpose

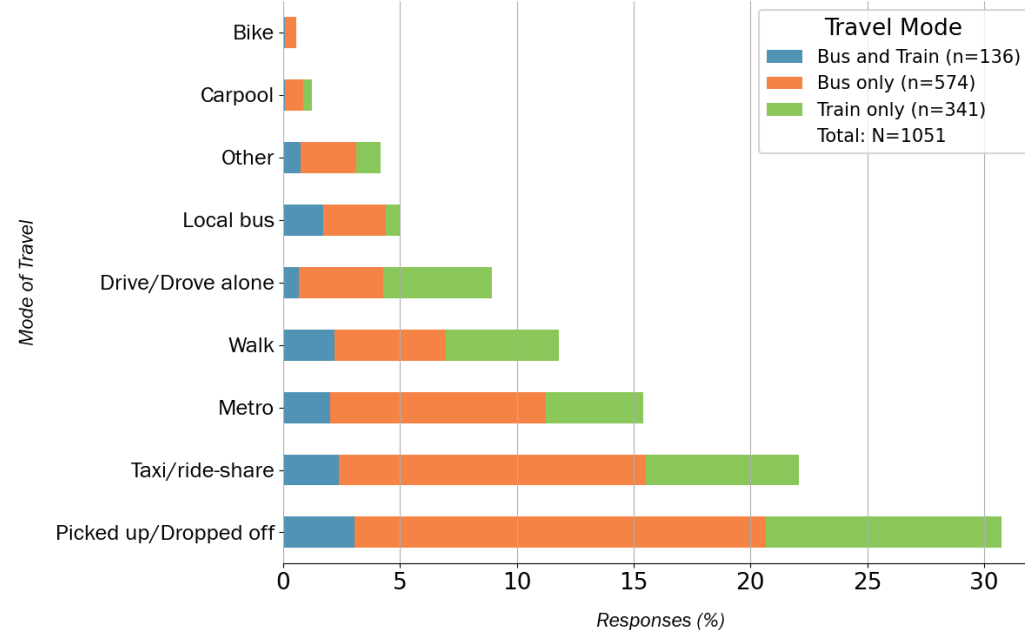


Key Findings

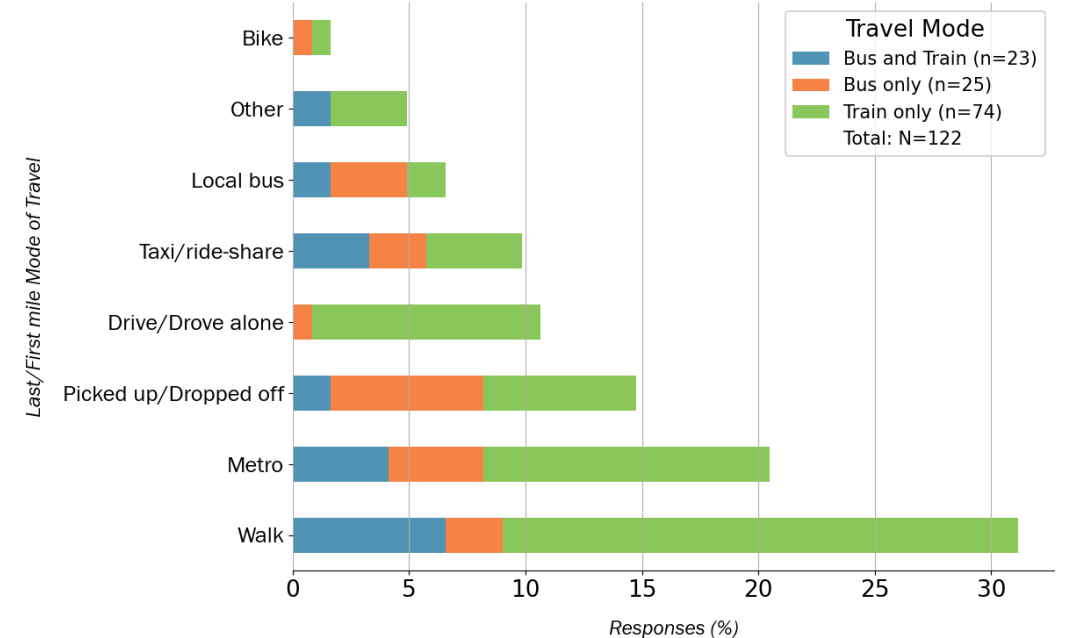
- Most intercity travel was for leisure or visiting family/friends (>70%), primarily by bus.
- One-time work/business trips were mainly by bus, while frequent trips were by train.



Intercept Survey – First and Last Mile



First and Last Mile



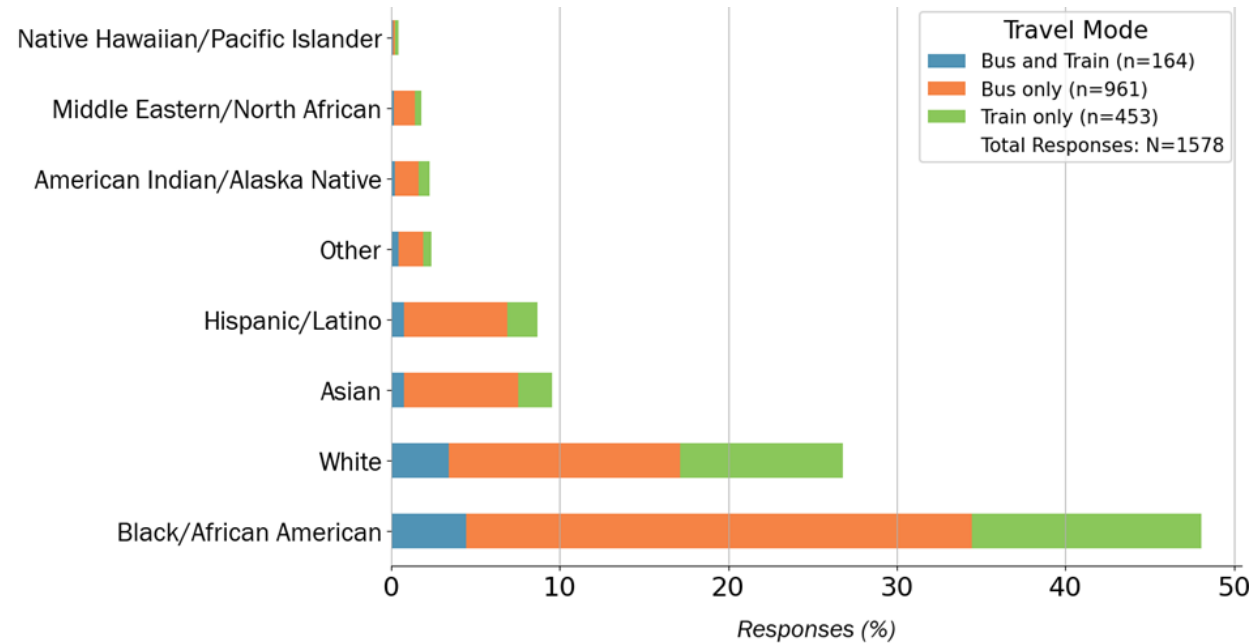
First and Last Mile Among Frequent (Daily, or Nearly Daily, and Weekly) Commuters

Key Findings

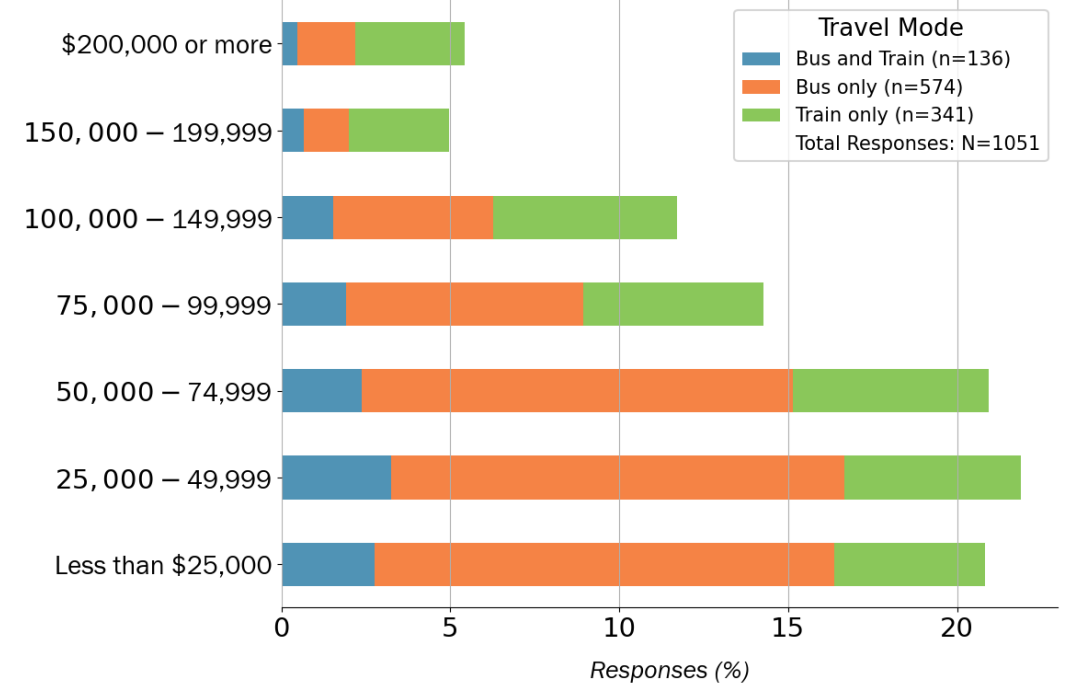
- The main ways to access intercity stations were pickup and drop-off, taxis, and ride-shares. Many also used the metro and local buses.
- Despite a small sample size, many intercity commuters walked or took the metro to reach stations.



Intercept Survey – Sociodemographic



Race/Ethnicity



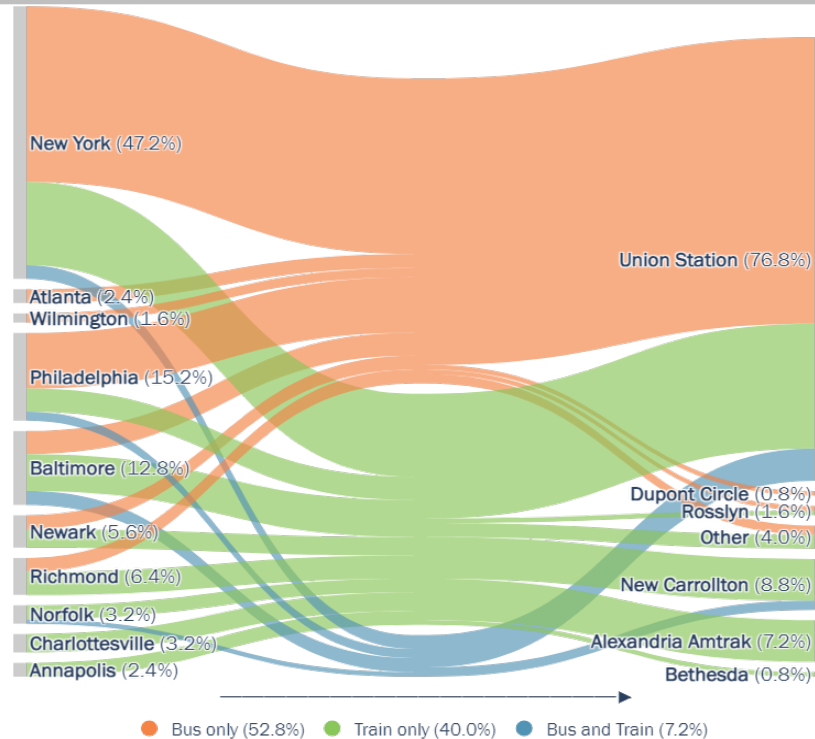
Household Income (Pre-tax 2023)

Key Findings

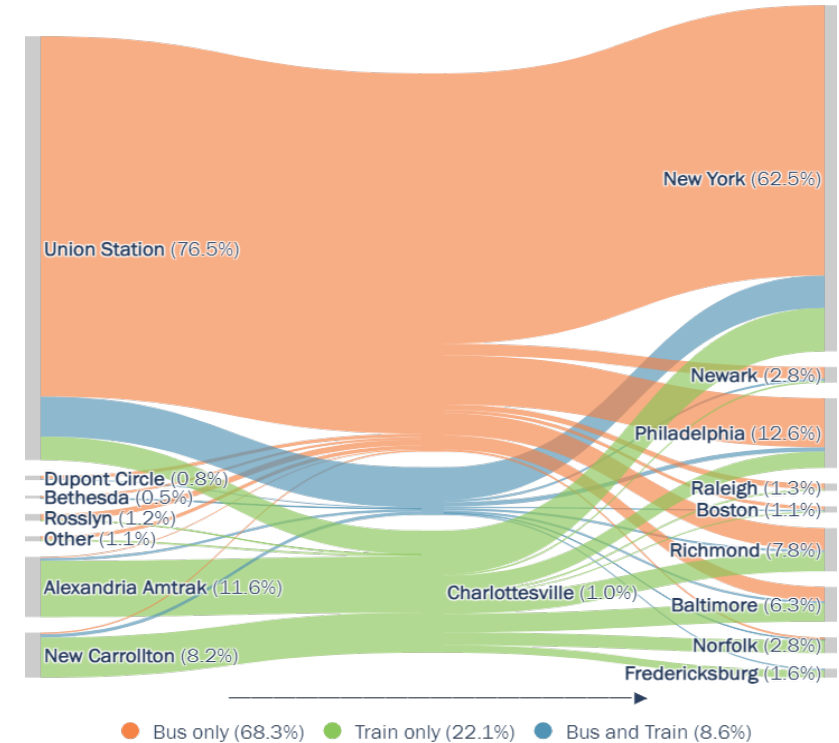
- Hispanic/Latino, Asian, and Black/African American respondents used buses more frequently than White respondents.
- Lower-income groups primarily used buses for intercity travel, while higher-income travelers favored trains.



Intercept Survey – Geographic Distribution of Trips



Arrivals



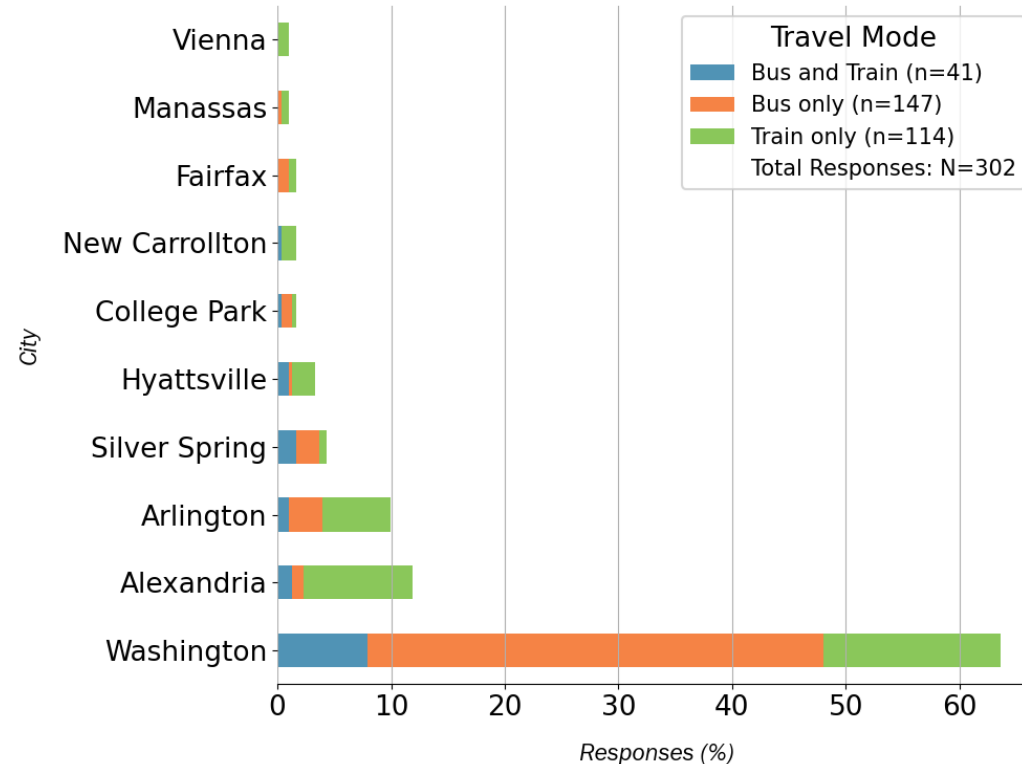
Departures

Key Findings

- New York was the city with the most origin/destination, and Union Station was the most common station.
- Most respondents used buses exclusively, with more using them for departures than arrivals.



Intercept Survey – Origin or Destination in the NCR



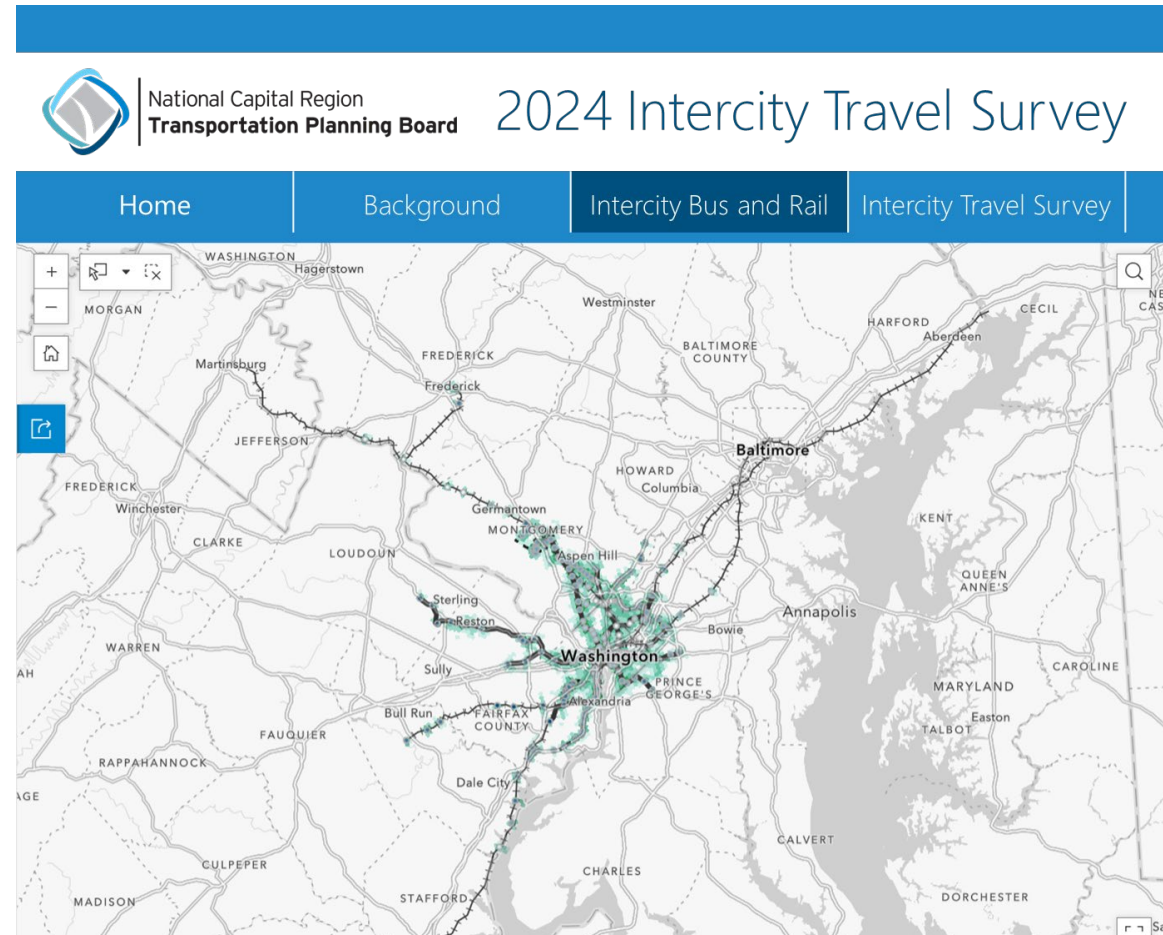
Starting or Destination Locations

Key Findings

- Washington, D.C., reported the highest share of trips among all jurisdictions
- Most respondents used buses, followed by trains.
- The train is a common mode of intercity travel for cities with access to Amtrak stations, such as Alexandria, Arlington, and New Carrollton.



Web Map



<https://tpb-intercity-travel-survey-mwcog.hub.arcgis.com/>

Interactive web map

- Highlights travel trends and services available

Data Included

- Intercity and Commuter services
- Service by provider, route, location
- Intercept survey

Data Dashboards

- Visualizations and tables
- Demographics and travel volumes
- Travel survey information

Recommendations



**Promote Bus and
Rail for Intercity
Travel Options**



Equity Consideration



**Intercity Bus and
Rail Performance
Measures**



**Station
Improvements**



**Enhance First and
Last Mile
Connectivity**



**Invest in Rail
Infrastructure**



**Diversify Intercity
Service Providers
and Modes**



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