



BLUEPRINT



Focus Groups

September 2023

Introduction

This report details the findings from a set of focus groups that were conducted as part of the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG) 2025 Blueprint initiative, which seeks to evaluate the connection between transportation and land-use in the greater six-county Sacramento region including El Dorado, Placer, Sacramento, Sutter, Yolo, and Yuba counties.

The focus groups were conducted by C2 Research, a local boutique market research consultancy based in Roseville, and were designed to collect input from a varied group of area residents on a range of regional topics that are critical to the area's future, such as housing, pricing options to maintain and build new roads, and perceptions of safety, and public health as it related to transportation. This report summarizes feedback from a diverse group of residents on each significant issue and emphasizes the main themes and recommendations across the groups.

Research Objectives

Among the focus group research objectives included:

- Gathering feedback, opinions, and perspectives of community members on a variety of current and future topics impacting the region.
- Gaining a better understanding of the values and needs of residents, particularly in relation to transportation, community growth, equity, housing, perceptions of safety, and health to create a more vibrant, resilient, and

inclusive region.

- Exploring ways to communicate information and updates to the community.

Research Methodology

The research is comprised of 8 online, video-enabled focus groups with a total of 69 residents representing each of the six-counties. The groups included individuals from a range of demographics (age, gender, ethnicity, household income), work status/professions, housing status (own, rent, living with others/relatives), years of living in the region, and levels of awareness and interest in community, government, and development. See the appendix for a breakdown of respondent profiles by group.

The research topics were divided into four areas:

- a) Housing
- b) Pricing
- c) Perceptions of Safety and
- d) Public Health.

Four focus groups were conducted in English and four focus groups were conducted in Spanish, with each being topic covered in both languages.

To ensure a diverse and representative group of participants, a range of recruiting methodologies were used to target both English and Spanish languages participants. Resources included outreach to local residents who have opted-in for opportunities to join focus groups through C2 Research, as well as postings and advertisements on various social media platforms, Craigslist.org, Nextdoor and other local community websites. C2 Research also utilized community-based organization outreach, networking through local

community organizations, printed flyers, and telephone outreach.

Through the use of both digital and traditional recruiting approaches, C2 Research was able to reach, engage, and recruit a diverse group of respondents with varying levels of technological proficiency.

To provide participants with flexibility in scheduling, the study was conducted during evening and weekend hours from March 23 to March 31, 2023.

Unaided Top of Mind Concerns

Each focus group began with the same set of questions to explore pressing issues and topics of interest across the community in an unbiased manner. This approach ensured consistency across the sessions and enabled researchers to capture community sentiments across all six counties including Sacramento, Yolo, Sutter, Yuba, Placer, and El Dorado and a mix of urban, suburban, and rural areas within each County. Additionally, each focus group discussed one topic of interest in greater detail.

Respondents who relocated to the Greater Sacramento region mentioned a variety of key drivers, such as attending college, new job opportunities, and a lower cost of living compared to other major metropolitan areas. The area's proximity to San Francisco, the wine region, Lake Tahoe, as well as year-round access to outdoor recreational activities and a relatively mild climate, also attracted respondents. On the other hand, those who grew up and spent their entire lives in the area appreciated the sense of community and connection to the region's history. They also value the opportunity to build a life and potentially raise a family in a place they know and love. Several respondents who grew up in the area moved from one city or neighborhood to another in the region, with such moves often being driven by housing affordability, access to schools, and proximity to their jobs before the pandemic. Additionally, respondents remarked on the growing arts, culinary, and music presence making the region a great place to live.

Respondents across all 8 groups believed the Greater Sacramento area needs to adapt to an

array of evolving regional planning needs. While certain challenges faced are not unique to this area and are also experienced by other regions within the state, they significantly impact the day-to-day lives of its residents.

Among the topics mentioned on an unsolicited basis by participants included concerns about lack of housing options and rising housing costs which have made it difficult for many residents to find affordable housing solutions. The high cost of utilities, including gas, food, and other essentials, was also identified a challenge. Additionally, traffic congestion and a surge in natural disasters like flooding events and wildfires were identified critical issues for residents of the Sacramento region. As a result, many people are worried about the availability of insurance that covers damage from natural disasters and the premiums associated with it.

Additionally, respondents highlighted the region's increasing cannabis farming activity, which has emerged as a significant concern for some residents. Water resources are also a pressing issue in the area, particularly given the scarcity of water rights in previous farming communities that are now being turned into housing developments. Perceptions of safety, crime, homelessness and unhoused populations, drugs, and mental health were cited as concerns as well. Along with access to healthcare and emergency services, especially in more rural communities, were of concern.

Another topic mentioned was a proposed bill in California that would increase registration fees for certain weight class vehicle types. Many questioned how the funds from the increased fees would be allocated and expressed frustration with the government's inability to effectively use its current resources before resorting to raising car registration fees.

Participants expressed their concern about the lack of community centers and community pools in rural areas, limiting access to recreational activities for residents, especially the youth. In addition, they emphasized the need for programs, resources and ease of transportation and parking to support small businesses and local entrepreneurship in rural communities, which could provide economic opportunities and strengthen the local economy.

A photograph of a row of modern, multi-story townhouses or small apartment buildings. The buildings are painted in various colors including blue, white, red, and grey, with dark roofs and multiple windows. They are situated behind a field of tall, dry, golden-brown grass. In the background, there are trees and a clear sky. A dark teal banner with the text 'Housing Affordability' is overlaid on the bottom part of the image.

Housing Affordability

Current housing needs

Housing was a significant and urgent concern for all residents in the region, with a particular focus on addressing inequities in affordable housing options for first-time buyers, working families, retirees, and minority populations .

When asked about the current housing situation in the region, respondents strongly emphasized the importance of a diverse mix of housing types, including large single-family homes, apartments, mixed-use buildings, and converting older structures into affordable housing units, to adequately address current and future housing demands. The consensus amongst respondents was that a one-size-fits-all approach would not suffice for the six-county region and there is need for housing type options to accommodate a wide range of personal preferences.

In the suburbs of Placer, Yolo, and El Dorado counties, respondents noted a mix of older homes and new developments, including both single-family homes and multi-family units are being used to accommodate growth. They also recalled seeing new senior living and memory care facilities in Folsom, but only a few low-income apartments.

In the rural regions of Yolo, Sutter, and Yuba, respondents observed a varied landscape of housing options, including larger single-family homes with large lots, trailer parks, RVs, and modular homes. Unlike in more urban areas, homelessness was seen as less prevalent in these regions due to limited support services. However, there were reports of new mobile and

temporary shelters emerging in El Dorado County and Yolo to address the needs of unhoused residents.

Several respondents also noted that families and friends are moving out of the region and state due to rising costs of home ownership and rent. To offset expenses, some respondents rented out rooms in their homes, while others lived with their aging parents to help with their care.

Long-term residents were resistant to new housing development, citing concerns about increased traffic and the financial strain on resources. However, smaller lots were seen as ideal for younger families in that they could create a greater sense of community and require less maintenance and water usage than larger lots. Respondents also noted an increase in mid-rise apartment developments including affordable units for 55+ and active adults in Folsom to new planned developments in Davis, and West Sacramento.

“Would you rather...” exercise

In the housing themed focus groups, respondents were asked to evaluate and consider 3 potential housing scenarios. The questions and options were framed as follows based on options provided by SACOG:

Whether you are thinking of relocating or staying where you live now: would you rather...?

Question A: Live in an area with different types of housing such as family homes, condos, townhouses, and apartments or live in an area with predominately single-family homes?

Feedback: Preference varied by life stage in the English and Spanish language groups. Most of the respondents who were married or with children preferred single-family homes and were willing to drive greater distances in exchange for more space and privacy. Millennials and empty nesters, or respondents with grown children no longer living in their household, were receptive to living in areas offering a range of housing options in the same community.

Question B: Live in a neighborhood where the homes are closer together and it is convenient to walk or use public transit to go to schools, work, and shopping or live in a neighborhood where the homes are further apart from one another, and you have to drive to school, work, and shopping?

Feedback: Similarly, respondents' preferences varied by life stage, and they indicated that housing pricing influenced what they would like versus what was realistic based on affordability.

Question C: Have a long commute to work and live in a larger home with a larger backyard or have a short commute to work and live in a smaller house with a smaller backyard?

Feedback: The preference for a larger home with a larger backyard or a shorter commute to work versus living in a smaller house with a smaller backyard varied significantly based on the number of people in respondents' households and their current homeownership status. Among younger, single respondents who were currently renting, the trend leaned toward preferring a smaller house, particularly in an urban setting.

Future Housing Needs

When prompted to think about future housing needs and trends in the region, the overwhelming consensus among respondents was that housing costs in the region are poised to increase significantly over the next 5 years. Universally, respondents recognized the importance of offering various housing options to address and mitigate racial disparities in housing caused by the escalating costs of housing and living in the region. In addition, they noted the importance of housing type options, as respondents recognized that their housing needs may evolve as they progress through different phases of life.

There was also a clear interest in transit-oriented developments situated in walkable neighborhoods, offering easy access to essential community spaces, activities and facilities such as parks, gardens, theaters, restaurants, schools, healthcare, public safety and emergency response services.

Looking ahead, several respondents who were renters or those living with roommates expressed a desire to modify their current living situation, seeking independent housing arrangements. Homeowners who had managed to secure low-interest home loans or refinanced their mortgages were more hesitant to voluntarily change their housing situations, indicating a preference for stability in their housing choices.

For those in the demographic of over 55 years old and whom are more commonly empty nesters', or approaching retirement age with grown children, community and recreational activities took on greater significance in their housing considerations. These individuals sought housing options that emphasized communal living and leisure amenities, reflecting their evolving priorities as they approach different stages of life.

In planning for the future, respondents felt that mixed-use living and retail spaces would be well-suited for urban areas such as downtown Sacramento, Roseville, Davis, and waterfront areas in West Sacramento. These communities tend to have younger residents who prefer the convenience of having shopping and dining options close by and may not have school-age children, and thus, proximity to schools is not a consideration.

Respondents also noted that future housing for themselves as well as the greater community could be influenced by the employment market and employers' policies regarding in-office work requirements. Many working in technology, project management, and similar white-collar roles preferred hybrid or remote work options. They indicated a preference for seeking new employment opportunities rather than enduring daily commutes lasting more than 15-30 minutes each way.

Revitalize Existing Buildings Versus New Construction

Respondents were asked whether they would

prefer to prioritize reusing and revitalizing existing assets, such as old buildings or vacant lots, or if they would prioritize new construction. The preference was split between the English and Spanish language groups. The group of English language respondents showed a strong preference for revitalizing existing buildings rather than opting for new construction. They pointed to several successful examples, including the planned revitalization of Sunrise Mall in Citrus Heights. Another suggested example of revitalizing existing properties was the transformation of old government buildings in downtown Sacramento into affordable housing. Respondents also pointed out the successful redevelopment of Arco Arena, now repurposed as a government building. Participants also mentioned the Creamery as another example of a successful mixed-use redevelopment project that has had a positive impact on the area creating lively and dynamic environments for living, working, and playing in the Sacramento community.

Although repurposing existing buildings was an idea that appealed to the Spanish language group, they believed that constructing new developments with the latest building codes factored in from the beginning would be more affordable and lead to faster project timelines.

Focus Group Exercise: Respondents were asked which of these things, if any, would you be willing to do to help make housing more affordable in your neighborhood?

- Bike, walk, and take transit more to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- Live in more compact housing to preserve farmland.
- Live in existing communities opposed to new developments.
- Telecommute
- Live closer to services to reduce traffic congestion.

The majority of respondents selected option D, the option to telecommute. While many selected telecommute as an alternative preference and the reason they moved to the region, they also recognized that this may not always be feasible, as it depends on the employer and industry. It was also noted that the ability to work remotely may change in the future as some employers

require their employees to return to the office. Options A (bike, walk and take transit) followed as the second option but respondents expressed that they would be more inclined to use public transit if it served the areas they wanted to visit with increased frequency. Their responses were influenced by lifestyle preferences, life stage, and overall health status.

Housing Recommendations

As part of the closing thoughts to summarize housing needs in the community, respondents stressed the importance of a public-private cooperative strategy for both developing the Sacramento region and safeguarding its natural resources and green infrastructure, such as effectively managing stormwater runoff and creating pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods. They voiced concerns about the slow and bureaucratic nature of the government's approach to land use development and the importance of finding a balance between development and conservation. Many participants suggested that the government work more closely with private developers to achieve this balance.

Additionally, respondents emphasized the need for reliable infrastructure and utilities, particularly high-speed internet in rural communities. Finally, participants highlighted the importance of transportation, with many expressing the desire for more efficient and accessible modes of transportation to enable them to reach their destinations in a timely manner.



Road Pricing

Current Modes of Transportation

When asked about their current modes of transportation, all participants in the study owned at least one car. Only one respondent in the two pricing themed groups owned an electric vehicle. The respondent switched due to rising fuel costs when he used to commute to work before the start of Covid.

In addition, nearly one-third of all respondents engaged in recreational bike use, which saw an increase during the pandemic. However, they expressed that they would not utilize bicycles for their daily transportation needs due to concerns regarding safety and distracted drivers. It was an opinion amongst respondents that the region is in need of additional dedicated bike lanes to encourage greater bike usage as an alternative means of transportation to cars or public transportation.

Nearly one-third of respondents mentioned utilizing shared electric mobility vehicles like Lime scooters and Jump bikes in urban settings on an ad hoc basis. However, they expressed concerns about their physical safety and that these micro mobility options are being abandoned on city streets. No one owned their own e-scooter.

Approximately one-quarter of participants reported they utilized light rail for transportation and that they used it on an infrequent basis. The others reported they did not use light rail because it doesn't directly serve the places they needed to reach, and there were concerns about safety.

One participant compared his experience riding the light rail to using the subway in New York City. He said he felt safer on the New York subway because it had more people and staff present. In contrast, the light rail had fewer passengers and less staff, making him feel less safe.

In the pricing themed focus groups, participants shared their thoughts on transportation preferences. One participant expressed a strong desire for improved transit, saying, "I would love a robust, clean, safe public transportation system." This comment reflects the need for an improved public transportation system that prioritizes cleanliness and safety, addressing common concerns.

Another participant mentioned, "I could ride my bike places but it's too dangerous" indicating willingness to utilize a bike for transportation, but the perceived safety risks act as a deterrent.

A participant shared a personal experience of biking, stating, "several of my friends have been hit or nearly hit by cars." This firsthand account of bike-related accidents or near-misses highlights the participant's concerns about biking safety.

One participant commended their local community for conducting effective planning, saying, "Davis is excellent for biking... and I think it's safe here. Loads of bike lanes and pretty green belts." The participant appreciates Davis as a bike-friendly and safe environment, attributing it to the abundance of bike lanes and green spaces.

Conversely, another participant expressed

concerns about their area, stating, “people tend to drive very aggressively in the Roseville area - biking around is very risky - even the bike lanes are risky.” These observations underscore the importance of improving road safety and encouraging bike-friendly infrastructure.

Toll Roads and Bridges

As part of a general warm up conversation regarding road pricing, most participants were aware of the toll roads in the Bay Area and Los Angeles. However, their personal usage of fee-based toll roads depended on the sense of urgency to reach their destination. Over half of the respondents had FasTrak passes, but they expressed frustration with not knowing the exact cost, having to pre-pay for the tolls, and funding transponders based on prior usage. Those without FasTrak expressed anxiety when approaching toll lanes and bridges, fearing not having cash, automatic billing, and incurring late fees.

Participants expressed their willingness to use toll lanes as long as there is a feasible option available for those who cannot afford to pay the additional charge. However, there was a concern about unpaid tolls and the potential consequences, such as delinquency or penalties through California Department of Motor Vehicles or the Franchise Tax Board and potentially garnished wages.

When the topic of air quality concerns in the region and the requirement for new highway lanes to function as carpool lanes or toll lanes arose, respondents expressed a clear preference for new toll lanes over carpool lanes. Their preference was influenced by their observations of solo drivers disregarding carpool lane restrictions and the lack of consistent enforcement of infractions. The participants acknowledged that they typically use carpool lanes when traveling with family and friends, rather than for their original intended purpose of carpooling to work. They also expressed concern that many single occupancy drivers misuse the carpool lane, and that there is insufficient enforcement of this violation.

The issue of road maintenance was another topic of concern among the participants. Many wondered why they should have to pay an

additional cost when their taxes are already allocated towards the upkeep of roads, highways, and bridges. While participants were aware that the gas tax is designated for infrastructure maintenance, they expressed their mistrust in the government's handling of funds and called for greater transparency and accountability in the use of gas tax revenue. In this regard, the participants found roadwork funding signs to be helpful, particularly at the local level, as they provide information on which projects are being funded by which entities.

Pricing Method Exercise

In the road pricing focus groups, participants were asked to share their perspectives and preferences regarding four different examples of potential alternative gas and diesel transportation taxes. The objective was to explore funding options that would be sustainable, taking into account the growing popularity of electric vehicles and decline of gas-tax revenue which is contributing to an expected annual funding shortfall of several hundred million dollars needed for essential repairs to roadways, sidewalks, bike lanes, support infrastructure, and transit vehicles.

Respondents were presented with four different road pricing options followed by a series of different scenarios.

The four different pricing options included::

- **User fees**—travelers pay based on how much they use the system, like paying by miles traveled
- **Fuel taxes**—travelers pay based on how much fuel they buy, like a per gallon charge on gas
- **Sales taxes**—travelers pay based on how much taxable merchandise they buy
- **Tolls**—travelers are charged for using specific roads to cover the cost of maintaining those roads, like express lanes in the Bay Area, Los Angeles and San Diego

Scenario 1: What do you think about using the following pricing methods to pay for maintenance on existing roads, highways, and bridges?

When asked about the pricing method to pay for maintenance on existing roads, respondents felt b) fuel taxes and c) sales tax were currently

being used and should continue to be used for maintaining roads. Participants expressed concern about the equity of user fees, particularly for rural communities that have to travel long distances to access shopping and services. To address this, some suggested offering tax credits as a potential solution. Additionally, participants believed that user fees might be challenging to track and monitor effectively, with drivers wanting real-time information on the applicable fees. The sentiments toward tolls were similar to those for sales taxes, with participants expressing the belief that current taxes should be sufficient to cover the costs, making it difficult to justify implementing new tolls for current maintenance.

Scenario 2: What do you think about using the following pricing methods to pay to build new roads, highways, and bridges?

The concept of user fees, where travelers pay based on how much they use the system (such as paying by miles traveled), was not perceived as equitable, particularly for rural communities that must cover substantial distances to access essential services. To address this, some participants suggested the possibility of offering a tax credit as a potential resolution. Additionally, they raised questions about who should bear the responsibility of funding the construction of new roads for housing communities, with the belief that the builder or homeowner should be responsible.

Fuel taxes were well known to the participants and considered a viable option, but there were concerns about their sustainability in the future due to the increasing adoption of electric vehicles. With the rise of electric vehicles, those who own them would potentially face higher electric bills instead as a potential tax to offset a decline in fuel tax surcharges.

Participants considered sales taxes a viable option, provided that the taxes collected are specifically allocated to local or regional projects.

Among the four pricing options, tolls were seen as a feasible approach for funding new roads, highways, and bridges since they are new areas of construction and area growth.

Scenario 3: What do you think about using the following pricing methods to pay for things like transit, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, or other

programs designed to make it easier for people to opt out of driving cars to access daily needs?

- User fees—In this proposed scenario, once again this was not seen as equitable for rural areas but reasonable for those who use public transit.
- Fuel taxes—Many felt this could be included in existing fuel taxes to pay for things like transit, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, or other programs designed to make it easier for people to opt out of driving cars to access daily needs.
- Sales taxes—This was viewed as a viable option to build, maintain sidewalks, bike lanes on a hyper local level.
- Tolls—Respondents did think tolls were appropriate to fund bike or pedestrian services but felt perhaps a cost passed on to ride share services companies.

The Rise of Electric Vehicles and Impact on the Decline of Gas Tax Revenue

When the focus groups were asked for their opinions about transitioning away from the California fuel tax, which will diminish on a per mile traveled basis over time, several respondents raised concerns about the exemption of electric vehicles from fees. They believe this exemption contributes to the decline in gas tax revenue and impacts funding for road infrastructure. A conversation ensued among participants regarding the widespread adoption of electric vehicles and the fact that they are exempt from certain registration fees but have privileges to use HOV carpool lanes. While some argued that electric vehicles have a positive impact on air quality, others emphasized that they still cause wear and tear on roads and should, therefore, contribute to road maintenance fees similar to other vehicles.

The participants suggested that the government should consider finding ways to incentivize electric vehicle usage while also ensuring that all drivers contribute fairly towards the maintenance of roads and infrastructure.

Additionally, participants in the focus group discussed the potential future cost of electric vehicles in comparison to gasoline-powered cars. They noted that while electric vehicles currently offer cost savings in terms of fuel, they assumed that over time the cost of recharging

their vehicles may increase, potentially making electric vehicles less attractive financially. Some participants mentioned the possibility of tiered electric rates in California, which could result in higher costs for those who use more electricity to charge their vehicles. As a result, they speculated that the cost of operating electric vehicles could eventually become comparable to or even exceed the cost of gasoline-powered cars.

Pricing Recommendations

To fund the maintenance of existing roads, highways, and bridges, respondents suggested continuing to rely on local sales tax revenue, which is commonly used in select areas for this purpose. However, for the construction of new roads, highways, and bridges, participants favored the implementation of tolls or dedicated toll lanes, provided that drivers have the option to avoid these toll roads and/or lanes if so desired. It was important to the participants that these toll roads or lanes do not eliminate any existing lanes, and that the funds generated from tolls are specifically allocated towards maintaining local and regional roads.

In order to ensure fairness and equity, the group recommended offering tax credits to residents of rural areas or individuals within certain income levels who choose the gas tax alternative. This approach aims to address concerns about the impact of tolls on different communities and income groups, allowing for more flexibility in transportation funding while maintaining a balance between user fees and broader tax-based financing options. Furthermore, two participants suggested exploring the idea of the more extreme approach to restrict driving to specific days of the week or long-term plans for congestion zones charged higher fees to enter certain high traffic areas in case the region grows in scale, akin to the Bay Area.



Perceptions of Safety

Perceptions of Safety & Transportation

Participants discussed various concerns related to perceptions of safety while walking, biking, or driving in their communities. When asked about their perceptions of safety while walking, biking, driving, or using public transportation in their community, respondents expressed concerns across all modes of transit. Among the highlighted issues are the volume of traffic, congestion, speeding drivers, lack of safe bike lanes and sidewalks, road conditions like potholes, and insufficient street lighting. Participants felt that pedestrians and cyclists should have the right of way, but it is often not enforced, and there are few areas with dedicated bike lanes that are wide enough.

One of the major issues raised was the increase in car accidents and bicycle accidents due to driver behaviors such as distracted driving, lack of judgment, and driving under the influence (DUI) of alcohol or drugs.

According to the participants, one way to reduce the number of accidents caused by distracted driving and excessive speeds would be to introduce stricter laws, harsher penalties, and additional education to new and young drivers such as social media posts, cases, survivor stories.

Additionally, some participants suggested that monitoring certain areas, such as roads with a high incidence of accidents, could also help to prevent accidents. For instance, the police successfully resolved the issue of Friday night speed racing down Sunrise Avenue by

increasing their presence in that area. Three male respondents vividly remembered their youth experiences of watching a series of educational films titled "Red Asphalt." These films focused on the severe consequences of reckless driving and showcased real-life car accidents. For these individuals, the viewing proved to be a life-changing moment, leaving a lasting impression on their awareness and perceptions of safety and transportation. They described it as an "eye-opening" experience that significantly influenced how they approached driving and road safety.

In general, respondents felt that more emphasis should be placed on protecting the safety of pedestrians and bike riders, rather than simply fining drivers more for red light violations. Another concern raised was the safety of light rail, particularly in relation to homelessness and the limited number of conductors on board.

Participants recommended measures to address this issue, such as increased security on light rail trains and stations.

In addition to light rail, respondents emphasized the need for improvement in the bus system within the region for several reasons, including reaching areas of interest in a reasonable amount of time and addressing concerns for physical safety. One suggestion was to increase the frequency of bus routes to commonly visited areas and businesses. By doing so, the commute time could be reduced, making it a more viable option for people compared to driving or using ride-sharing services like Uber or Lyft. This, in

turn, could help reduce traffic congestion and improve air quality.

However, some participants pointed out that the current bus routes may not be the most convenient or efficient. They suggested that enhancements to the overall system, such as the implementation of technology to track buses and provide real-time updates on arrival times, could make public transportation a more attractive option for commuters. Additionally, these improvements could address some of the perceptions of safety concerns associated with waiting for public transportation.

Another suggestion for improving public safety and transportation discussed by the participants included better timing of traffic lights and the use of predictive sensors to improve traffic flow. They also suggested improving the use of roundabouts through education and better road design, particularly in downtown Sacramento where some roundabouts were built in too small of an area. These improvements could help reduce traffic congestion and improve safety for all road users.

Participants viewed Davis as a model for biking communities based on its infrastructure and strong community culture. They also realized it would be difficult to replicate this in rural areas with great distances between services.

Participants admired the proactive approach to transportation and biking that is evident in Davis, which showcased a remarkable long-term vision in its planning. They appreciated the foresight and consideration given to future transportation needs, which resulted in an efficient and well-designed transportation network. On the other hand, they questioned why some other communities seemed more short-sighted in their planning. For instance, one respondent raised the question about certain areas only initially investing "only \$1 million to create two new freeway lanes per mile when it would cost just \$1.3 million to add an extra lane that would be needed in the future." Such comparisons made them realize the importance of thinking long term and evaluating spending the extra money today on additional roads that will be needed in the future. This perspective highlighted the significance of strategic decision-making in community planning, as it could save significant

costs and resources in the long run.

The focus group also discussed concerns about crime and stolen bikes, as well as personal safety issues, particularly associated with distracted drivers. Several examples were given of participants being physically attacked and having their bikes stolen on trails by the homeless. These issues underscored the need for more attention to be paid to public safety and transportation in the community.

With respect to freeways participants raised concerns about several freeways, including the Capital Interchange and Highway 65 in Placer County, which they felt were prone to safety issues. Participants suggested that drivers needed more education on merging, and that better signage and road markings could also help improve safety. Potholes were also a concern, particularly for motorbike riders who are more vulnerable to accidents caused by uneven road surfaces.

The group also discussed a local issue regarding a proposed warehouse in El Dorado Hills. Participants were worried that the two-lane roads leading to the warehouse would not be able to support the large number of people and trucks using it each day. This could lead to traffic congestion and safety hazards for drivers and pedestrians in the area. Some suggested that the county should require the warehouse operator to contribute to road improvements to alleviate these concerns.

Perceptions of Safety Recommendations

When asked about designing new roadways for new neighborhoods and what should be prioritized or kept in mind, many thoughts turned to considering the behavior of society. Participants voiced their worries that the current society is becoming indifferent to tragic incidents and drivers are no longer displaying considerate behavior. They discussed potential solutions to enhance safety and diminish congestion on the roads, such as introducing self-driving cars, encouraging being more considerate while driving, promoting shared vehicle options, and better enforcement of speed laws. Respondents also suggested providing better options for public transportation that connects the greater Sacramento region, and innovative

ride share transportation services similar to the on-demand VIA service in West Sacramento. Lastly, participants would like safer and more dedicated demarcations for bike lanes on city roads, and more nature trails.

When thinking about designing new communities, respondents also suggested “having two ways out of a community is essential...” and to “learn from what happened in River Park, we should prioritize proper access roads and layouts that facilitate quick and safe evacuations.” The real-life experiences of residents from River Park with limited outlets during a flooding event left a lasting impact on the respondents. “Designing two ways out not only ensures safety during evacuations but also helps ease traffic congestion during peak times.”



Public Health

This focus group explored the connection between public health and transportation. In their daily routines, few respondents acknowledged walking or biking on a consistent basis. Participants residing in urban areas reported that they preferred to walk, bike, or use electric scooters when traveling to their desired destinations but it was influenced by proximity to destinations such as shopping or local parks. However, for others, walking or cycling was more so used as a form of exercise in their neighborhoods or on trails. The biggest obstacle for those living in suburban and rural areas to increase their frequency of walking or cycling was the long distance between their destinations of interest. Having a pet dog, young children, or an interest in sports or nature was found to increase the likelihood of spending time outdoors. Many walked or exercised to help with their overall physical and mental well-being.

Perceptions of Public Health

Participants' perceptions of public health were shaped by a multifaceted perspective, strongly influenced by their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of two years in lockdown, they have now placed greater emphasis on aspects like happiness, quality of life, achieving balance, and prioritizing mental health. During the pandemic, catching up on deferred preventive health appointments became a priority for them. Food-related concerns were also prominent, with participants questioning the availability and quality of healthy food options. Many sought local alternatives such as farmers markets to address this issue.

Moreover, they expressed apprehension about chemicals and pollution as significant factors affecting public health, particularly regarding their potential impact on air and water quality.

Public Health & Transportation

Interestingly, despite the popularity of hybrid and electric vehicles, some participants felt that air quality was not improving as expected. They believed there may be a need for greater education to explain the expected versus actual environmental benefits of alternative modes of transportation over time.

Obesity was also identified as a key public health issue, with participants suggesting that a lack of access to healthy food and opportunities for physical activity were contributing factors. Some participants also expressed concern about the lack of safe and accessible spaces for exercise, particularly in low-income and rural areas.

When participants were questioned about their own health and hypothetically if their doctors were to warn them about the risk of hypertension, coronary heart disease, obesity, or type 2 diabetes, they acknowledged they would incorporate more walking or biking into their daily routines. However, they also admitted that their response to this advice would be more reactive rather than proactive. In other words, they tend to make changes only after being alerted to potential health risks, rather than actively adopting these activities as a preventive measure from the outset.

The Role of Developers

One respondent who was knowledgeable and

active in his Yolo County community noted that creating safe and accessible transportation options is not solely on the government. He mentioned that in many cities, developers have taken over the responsibility of building parks, schools, and sidewalks, which used to be public infrastructure. While this allows for more rapid development, it also means that the location and quality of these amenities are at the mercy of private interests.

For instance, in Winters, a new park was built by a developer, but it has no grass due to the developer's failure to maintain it. Similarly, many cities lack parks and basketball courts, which limit outdoor activities for residents. Respondents believed this could lead to health issues such as obesity and other chronic diseases.

The Presence of Trees

Participants were questioned about the volume of trees in their neighborhood and whether they offered sufficient shade for comfortable walking during the summer. They pointed out that older, well-established neighborhoods like Carmichael and Land Park tend to boast mature trees, whereas newer housing areas like the Serrano neighborhood in El Dorado Hills predominantly have new shrubs. The respondents expressed their love for trees and the valuable shade they provide, appreciating how their presence contributes to a sense of community and harmony with nature.

However, despite the positive impact of trees, participants acknowledged the challenges posed by the scorching summer temperatures, particularly during the peak months of July and August when average temperatures often reach 100 degrees or higher. They recognized that even with an abundance of trees, the shade they offer might not be enough to combat the intense daytime heat during these months. Nevertheless, they still considered trees to be an essential part of their neighborhoods, contributing to the overall well-being and aesthetic appeal, even if the shade they provide has limitations in extreme weather conditions.

Transportation Safety and the Impact on Public Health

According to the respondents, public transportation is an area that requires

improvement to better facilitate the relationship between transportation and public health. Many respondents do not feel safe taking light rail or buses, and ticket enforcement is only strict during rush hour. Routes do not always reach the most popular destinations, which can make commuting a hassle. It is not uncommon for a trip that would take 30 minutes to drive to take 2.5 hours on public transit.

Perceptions of personal safety is also a concern, with some respondents reporting feeling unsafe walking or riding a bike in their neighborhoods due to the presence of shopping carts in the bike lanes and other hazards.

Bureaucratic Barriers to Progress

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Target Audience Nuances

County Specific Observations

In Sacramento County, there has been a notable increase in the construction of new apartments and mixed-use spaces. Alongside this development, concerns have arisen about homelessness, particularly the issue of downtown areas being affected by littering, often caused by displaced individuals without permanent housing.

In El Dorado County, the proposed warehouse, speculated to be Amazon, has sparked worries among the El Dorado Hills community. The main concern revolves around the potential traffic congestion that may further burden the already busy roads in the area.

Placer County was seen as experiencing a housing boom, even amid the current economic uncertainty and tech company layoffs affecting neighboring regions. The historical low interest rates were viewed as contributing to this boom, leading to increased construction activities.

Sutter, Yolo, and Yuba counties are undergoing a transformation from once rural areas into the next generation of suburbs. However, many residents have expressed concerns about the lack of infrastructure such as high speed internet, limited access to services, and the distance to healthcare facilities in these regions.

Comparative Analysis of English and Spanish Speaking Population

The research themes related to the four topics of housing, pricing, safety, and public health were consistent between the English language focus groups and Spanish language groups. However, respondents in the Spanish language groups were even more enthusiastic about mixed-use housing and smaller housing footprints. First generation respondents and naturalized citizens in particular felt this would benefit many first-time home homebuyers and cost-conscious renters.

The respondents in the Spanish language groups did not currently own electric vehicles and often cited reliance on public transportation and ride share services, a transportation platform that connects passengers with drivers through a mobile app, allowing individuals to request and pay for rides in private vehicles. As an alternative to gas tax fundings they suggested that instead of increasing taxes on everyone, policymakers should consider the income level of individuals before implementing such decisions. This approach would ensure equity in action.

Respondent Recommendations

Respondents felt it was important for local municipalities to work with developers for a public-private partnership to ensure:

Housing diversity and affordability: The participants emphasized the importance of creating affordable and diverse housing options in the region to meet the needs of all residents, including affordable housing, senior housing and housing for workers to live in the communities where they work.

Mixed-use development: There was a consensus among the participants that mixed-use development of residential, commercial, retail, and repurposing underutilized buildings is the way of the future, and it offers the opportunity to create more walkable and sustainable communities. They also wanted more parks, schools and bike paths to promote active, healthy lifestyles.

Sustainable urban growth restrictions: Several participants mentioned the need for urban growth boundaries to protect the region's agricultural land and open spaces and help protect farming regions and growing concerns about water rights.

Transportation and local transit: Respondents emphasized the need to focus improvements for local transportation and potentially offer on-demand bus services, increase frequency and cut travel time to key destinations to promote public transportation use and reduce dependence on cars. They also suggested timely repair of potholes and monitoring of speeding vehicles as these issues can contribute to accidents.

Alternative gas tax funding sources: Participants felt that toll roads were the most equitable option for funding a reduction in gas taxes as long as there were options for drivers who wanted to avoid paying a premium. Residents living in remote areas expressed their dissatisfaction with user-based fees, stating that they were unfair. They believe that they should be eligible for tax credits because they have limited access to services and businesses in their immediate region.

Safety: Respondents believe the homeless issue needs to be resolved in order for residents to feel safe walking and biking as an alternative form of transportation

Education: Respondents felt that public awareness and education was needed to help address some of the safety concerns with merging on freeways, sharing the roads with cyclists and pedestrians.

