

Travel Trends for Regional Growth Center Residents



The 2021 regional travel survey collected day-to-day information from households in the central Puget Sound region: how we traveled, where we went, how long it took – even where we chose to live and whether we got home deliveries. This report compares household travel choices in 2021, during COVID-19 conditions to that in the previous years of 2017 and 2019. In some analysis 2017 and 2019 survey samples have been combined to strengthen the statistical validity of the findings by increasing the number of respondents included in the analysis. Learn more at the [PSRC household travel survey webpage](#). You can also [view the full travel survey dataset here](#), including 2017, 2019, and 2021 data.

Population and Employment Growth in Centers

Centers are at the heart of VISION 2050 and the region’s approach to sustainably accommodating population and employment growth. Regional growth centers (RGCs) are dense, walkable, mixed-used areas and are home to many of the region’s most significant business, governmental, and cultural facilities. There were 29 designated RGCs in the region during the study period. PSRC’s Executive Board designated Greater Downtown Kirkland as the 30th RGC in July 2023.

Regional Growth Centers Demographics

Household composition, which influences travel behavior, looks different in regional centers when compared to the rest of the region. Compared to the rest of the region, RGCs have a much higher percentage of 18- to 34-year-olds, fewer children and a comparable share of seniors. Household income in RGCs is slightly lower than the region as a whole, with 31% of households with a median income lower than \$50,000. RGCs have significantly smaller household sizes on average, with double the share of single-person households and about half the share of households with three or more people compared to the rest of the region. Lastly, as RGCs offer more multimodal travel options,

Figure 1: Regional Growth Center Demographics (Source: U.S. Census Bureau - American Community Survey, 2021 (a)(c)(d)Census Block Group (b)Census Tract Estimates)

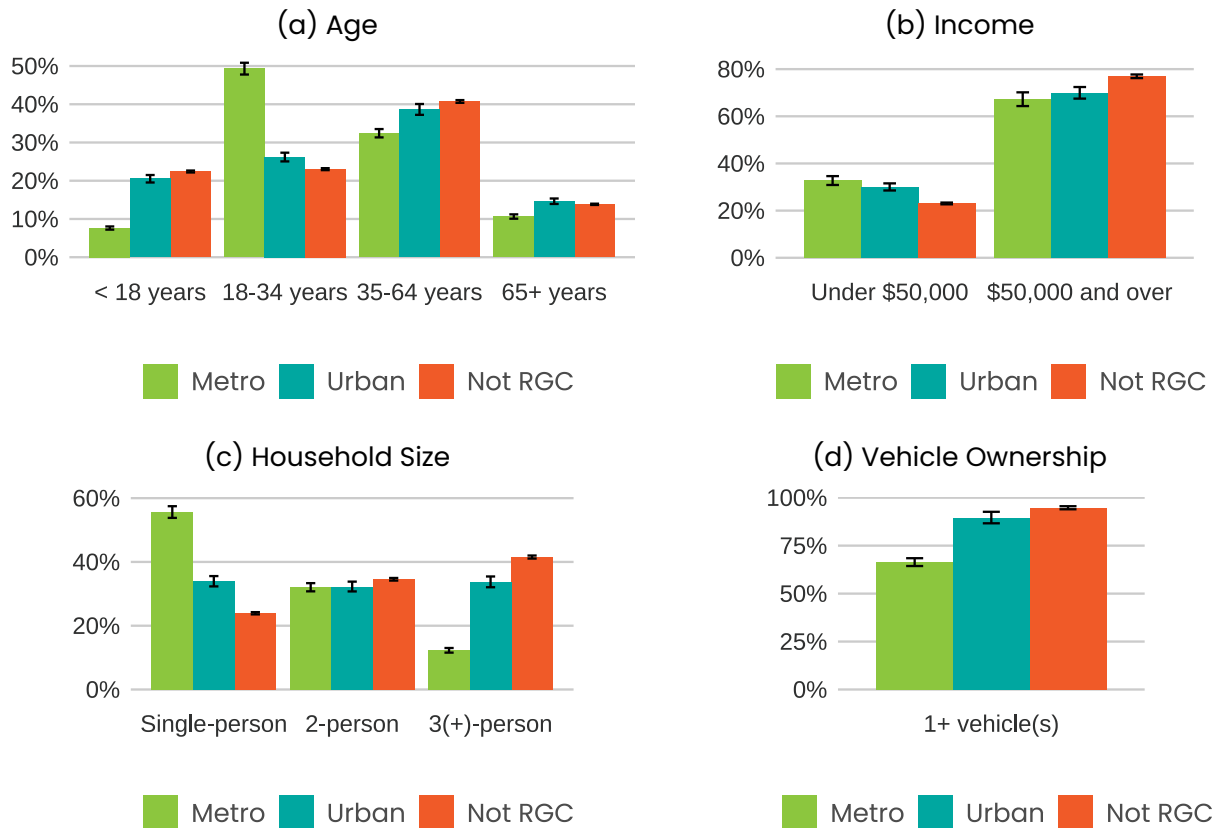


figure 1.d shows that RGCs have a lower vehicle ownership than the rest of the region. The I-shaped symbols on top of each bar in the charts below represent margins of error.

In 2018, the [Regional Centers Framework](#) defined two distinct types of regional growth centers: Metro and Urban growth centers ([center map](#)). Both types of growth centers have dense existing jobs and housing, high quality transit service, and are planning for significant growth. Metro growth centers have a primary regional role as major city centers in metropolitan cities and other fast-growing cities, while urban growth centers are important regional destinations but have lower current and planned densities.

Figure 2 shows that the two types of centers have different demographic compositions. Metro centers have a significantly higher percentage of 18- to 34-year-olds and single-person households, while Urban centers have age and household size distributions more similar to the rest of the region.

Figure 2: Metro and Urban Regional Growth Center Demographics (Source: U.S. Census Bureau - American Community Survey, 2021 (a)(c)(d)Census Block Group (b)Census Tract Estimates)



Although RGCs usually have good transit service, Urban centers had vehicle ownership rates similar to the rest of the region. Differences in demographics and vehicle ownership may affect how residents travel. In the next section, we will look more closely into differences in the travel behaviors of residents living in centers compared to the rest of the region.

Regional Growth Centers Travel Characteristics and Behaviors

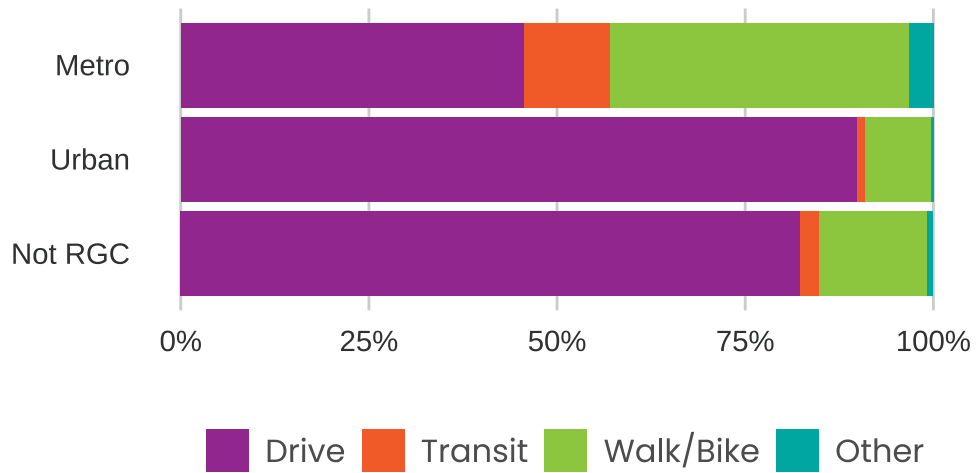
To support projected growth in RGCs, the region's plans call for an efficient multimodal transportation system that increases accessibility in the region. RGCs are important hubs in the region's current and planned high-capacity transit network under VISION 2050. In addition, regional and local plans focus on providing a more walkable and dense environment with multiple travel choices. This report applied 2017, 2019 and 2021 Household Travel Survey data to measure the travel behaviors of residents in RGCs and how their travel behavior is different than residents in the rest of the region. Commuters who live outside the centers make many of the trips destined to centers. Many of the centers serve as job centers as opposed to places where people live. This report does not include commuters or other travelers, such as shoppers or people attending events, who travel to centers from different home locations.

Mode shares

In Figure 3, Metro centers have a significantly lower share of driving trips, which includes trips with people traveling both alone (single-occupancy vehicles) and carpooling with others (high-occupancy vehicles), compared to Urban centers and the rest of the region in 2021. Residents in Metro centers also recorded a higher proportion of transit and walking/biking trips.

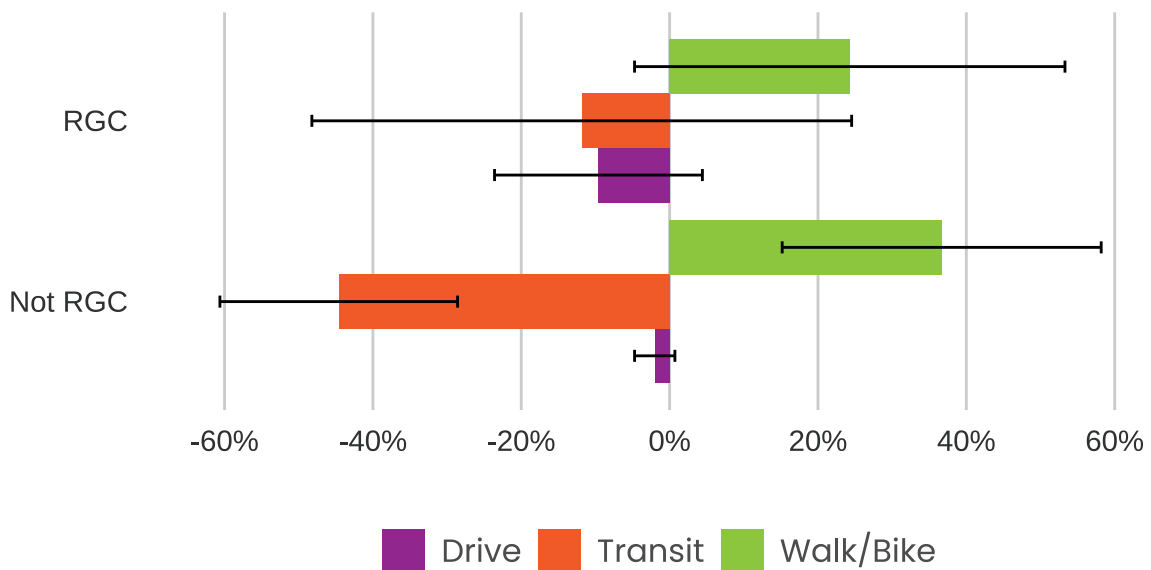
This reflects that Metro centers offer a more efficient multimodal transportation system than Urban centers, encouraging their residents to make more transit trips, as well as walk and bike more, instead of needing to make driving trips and possibly reducing car ownership. The data reflects the travel trends of residents in these centers. Since designated regional centers are major employment areas in the region and include about one-third of all jobs in the region, commute trips of residents traveling from all over the region represent a significant share of all trips in centers.

Figure 3: Mode Share (Source: PSRC 2021 Household Travel Survey)



After COVID-19 hit the central Puget Sound region in 2020, people’s travel behavior was seriously impacted. Figure 4 shows the transit mode share of areas outside of RGCs was affected significantly. In 2021, the share of transit trips decreased dramatically in the rest of the region compared to pre-COVID surveys in 2017 and 2019. On the other hand, the share of walking and biking trips in both RGC and non-RGC areas increased.

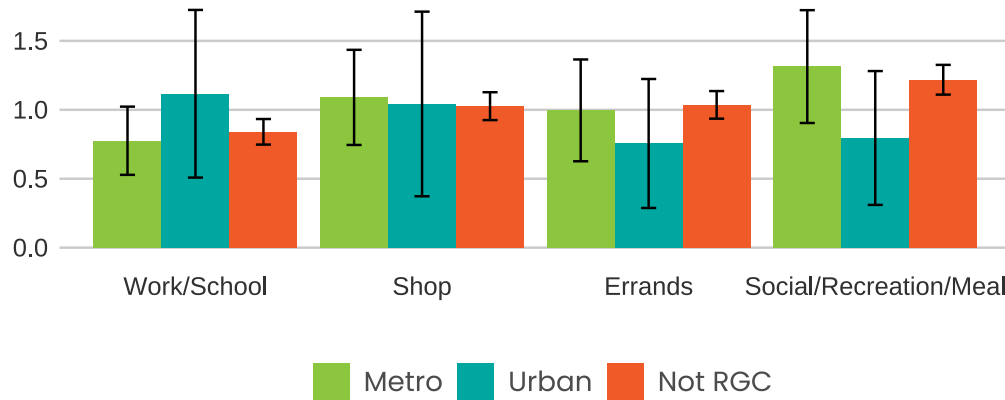
Figure 4: Change in Mode Share (Source: PSRC 2017/2019/2021 Household Travel Survey)



Trip Purpose

Figure 5 shows that the number of trips for each trip purpose across centers and non-RGC areas do not have noticeable differences. The residents living in centers and those in the rest of the region have similar trip purposes.

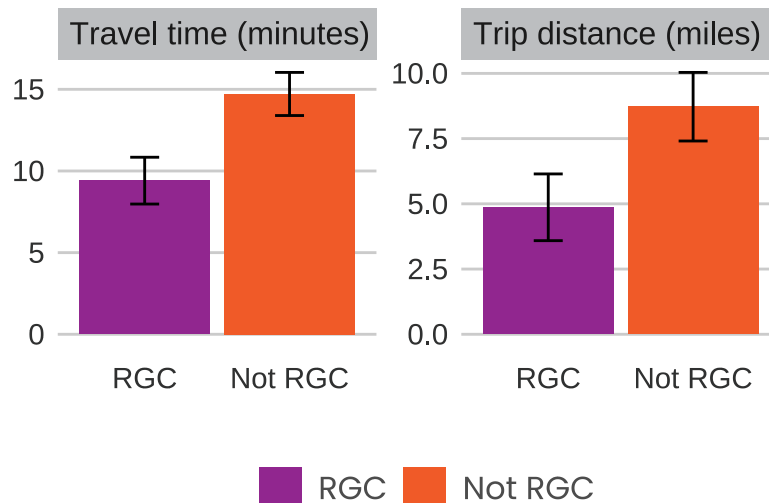
Figure 5: Average Number of Trips for Each Trip Purpose (Source: PSRC 2021 Household Travel Survey)



Trip Travel Time and Trip Distance

Figure 6 shows that the trips made by residents in RGCs are shorter in both time and distance compared to those in the rest of the region. Regional centers offer a dense mix of land uses and may allow shorter trips to destinations.

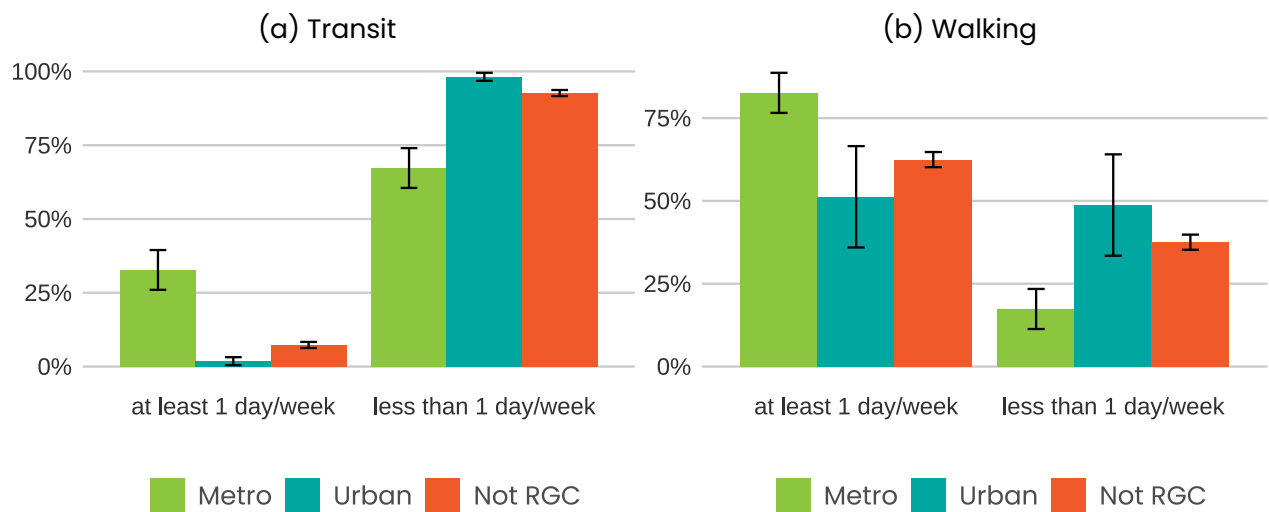
Figure 6: Average Travel time and trip distance (Source: PSRC 2021 Household Travel Survey)



Walk and Transit Frequency

Lastly, the survey data shows how many times in a week residents in centers walk or take transit. Metro centers have the highest share of their population taking transit and walking at least one day per week. The residents of Urban centers and the rest of the region walk less and take transit less frequently. Less than 10% of the people in these areas take transit at least one day per week.

Figure 7: Transit and Walking Frequency (Source: PSRC 2021 Household Travel Survey)



Conclusion

Regional centers are a key part of the region’s growth and mobility planning. Data on households in these areas offers insights in how people are getting around and demonstrates how the pandemic affected travel behavior.

[Download the data used in this Trend.](#)