

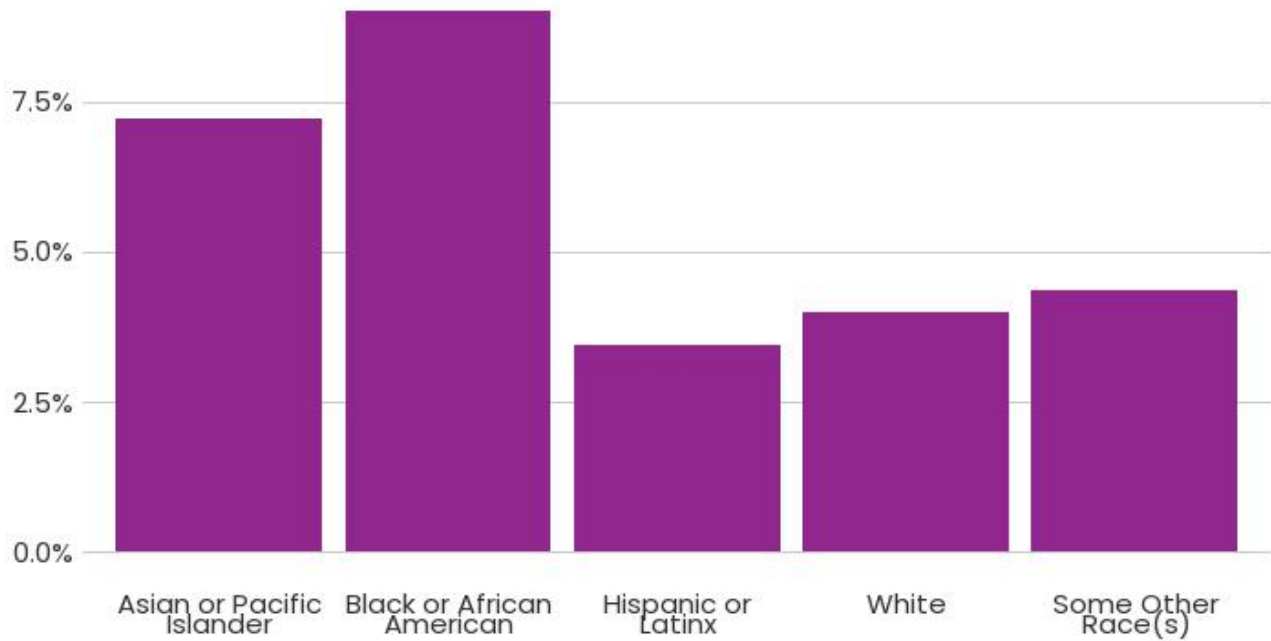
Commuting Behaviors of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders



In our recent [report](#) marking Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) month, PSRC delved into data on telework behaviors. We found that AAPI workers of the central Puget Sound region teleworked at the greatest rate – nearly 4 in 10 workers – relative to other racial and ethnic groups. There were, however, notable differences by county of residence and among different AAPI communities. The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent shift to telework for large segments of the population also disrupted commute patterns for those who work away from home. In this report, we'll examine how commuting behaviors, particularly commute mode shares, have changed for AAPI workers.

Before we turn to data on commute mode shares, it is useful to first consider car ownership because of its strong correlation with mode choice: people with no cars make strikingly different travel choices than those that have them. The most recent Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) Census data from 2021 shows that AAPI residents of the central Puget Sound region have among the highest shares of living in car-free households, at about 7%. This is comparable, or within the margin of error, to the rate for Black residents and almost twice the rates for other groups. These observations may be a result of where different communities live, what people can afford, what other transportation options are available and where people need to go, among other reasons. Of the estimated 200,000 residents in the region who do not have a car, approximately 47,000, or almost one quarter, are of Asian or Pacific Islander descent.

Share of People in Car-Free Households by Race and Ethnicity



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 2021 1-Year Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) Data in King, Kitsap, Pierce and Snohomish counties

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, AAPI workers of the central Puget Sound region stood out as being the least likely to drive to work and the most likely to commute by transit¹, according to the same Census data. In 2019, about 77% of AAPI commuters who usually worked away from home commuted by car², compared to 80–85% for other racial and ethnic groups. Conversely, the transit commute mode share was more than 15% for AAPI commuters and about 10–13% for other groups.

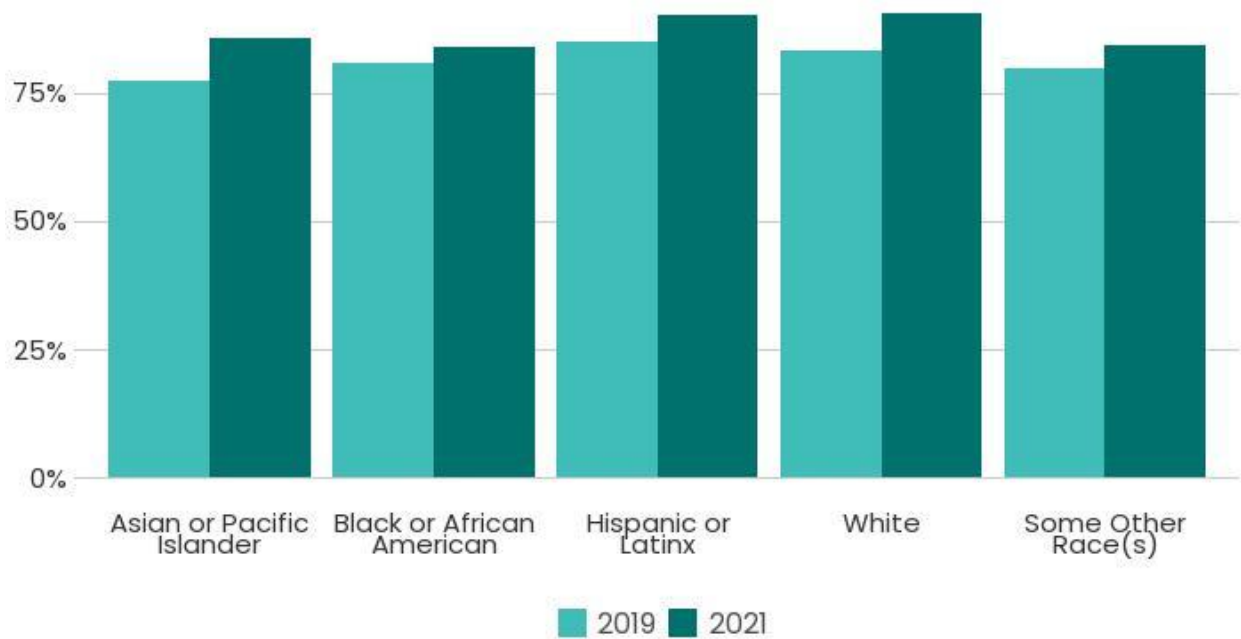
We noted in our recent [report](#) that the COVID-19 pandemic caused a titanic shift for many workers: the proportion of AAPI teleworkers increased by eight fold, from less than 5% in 2019 and to 38% in 2021. At the same time, for those who continued to work outside of home, AAPI commuters had the biggest jump in driving and the largest drop in transit use. The AAPI drive commute mode share increased by eight percentage points, to almost 86%, compared to increases of three to seven percentage points for other racial and ethnic groups. On the other hand, the AAPI transit commute mode share decreased by nine percentage points, down to less than 7%, compared to

¹ We are not reporting shares by race and ethnicity for other modes due to small samples.

² The commute mode share is calculated based on workers who usually work away from home; those who usually telework are not included in the total.

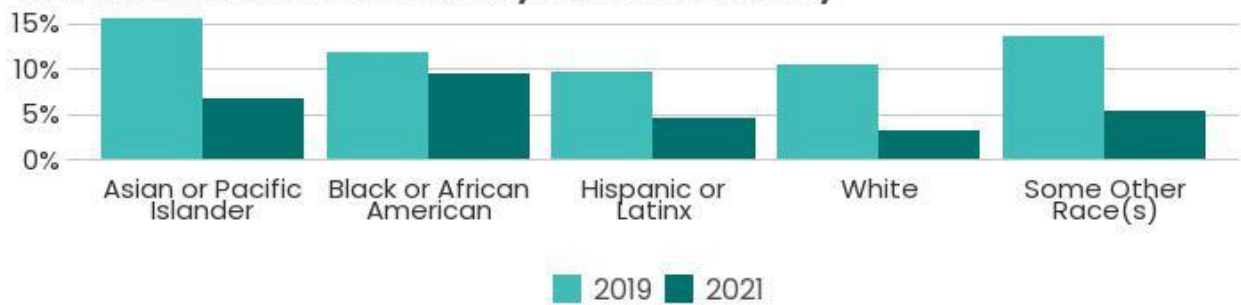
decreases of two to eight percentage points for other groups.

Drive Commute Mode Share by Race and Ethnicity



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 2019 and 2021 1-Year Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) Data in King, Kitsap, Pierce and Snohomish counties

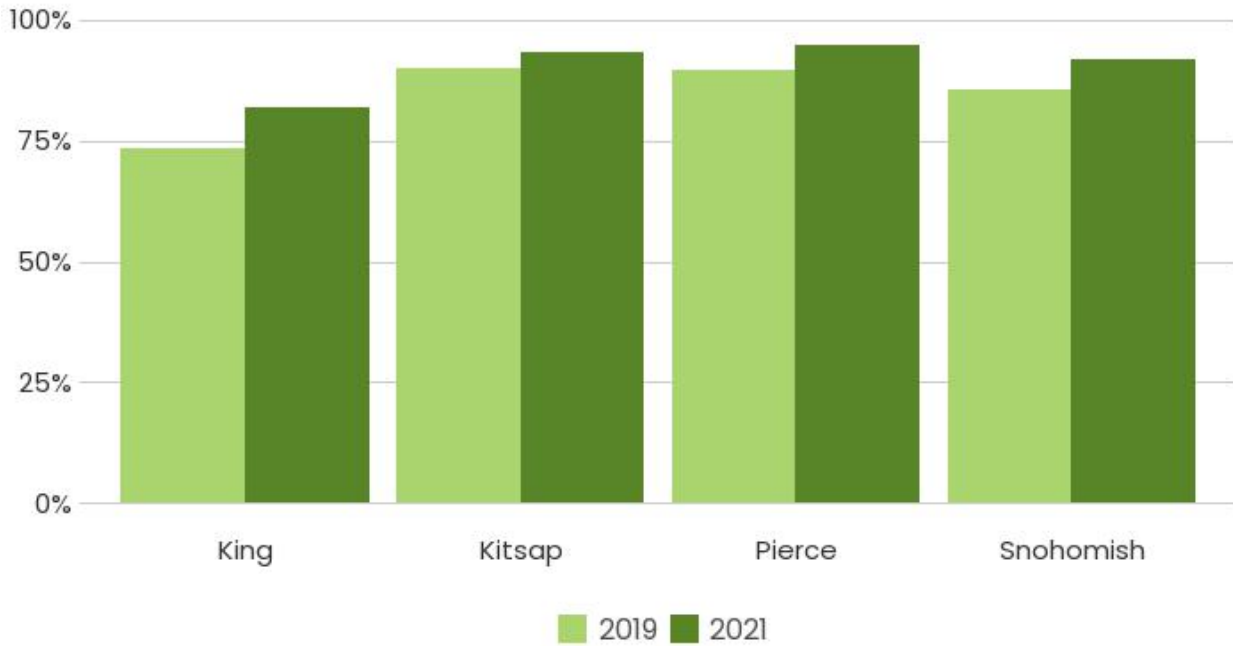
Transit Commute Mode Share by Race and Ethnicity



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 2019 and 2021 1-Year Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) Data in King, Kitsap, Pierce and Snohomish counties

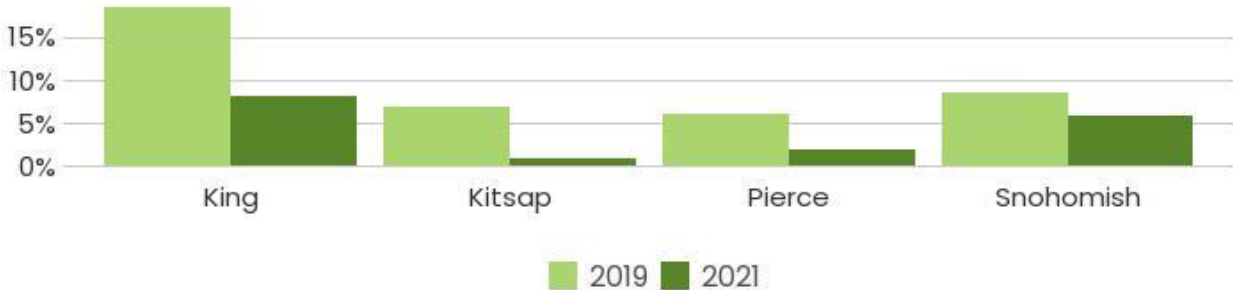
The regional commute mode shares described above for AAPI commuters can be parsed by county to reveal geographic differences. While the drive commute mode share for AAPI commuters in King County rose like the rest of the region in 2021, it continues to be significantly lower than the AAPI drive commute mode shares in Kitsap, Pierce and Snohomish counties. As for transit commute mode shares, there were significant drops for AAPI commuters in King, Kitsap and Pierce counties. The share of AAPI transit commuters in Snohomish County stayed roughly the same.

AAPI Drive Commute Mode Share by County



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 2021 1-Year Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) Data in King, Kitsap, Pierce and Snohomish counties

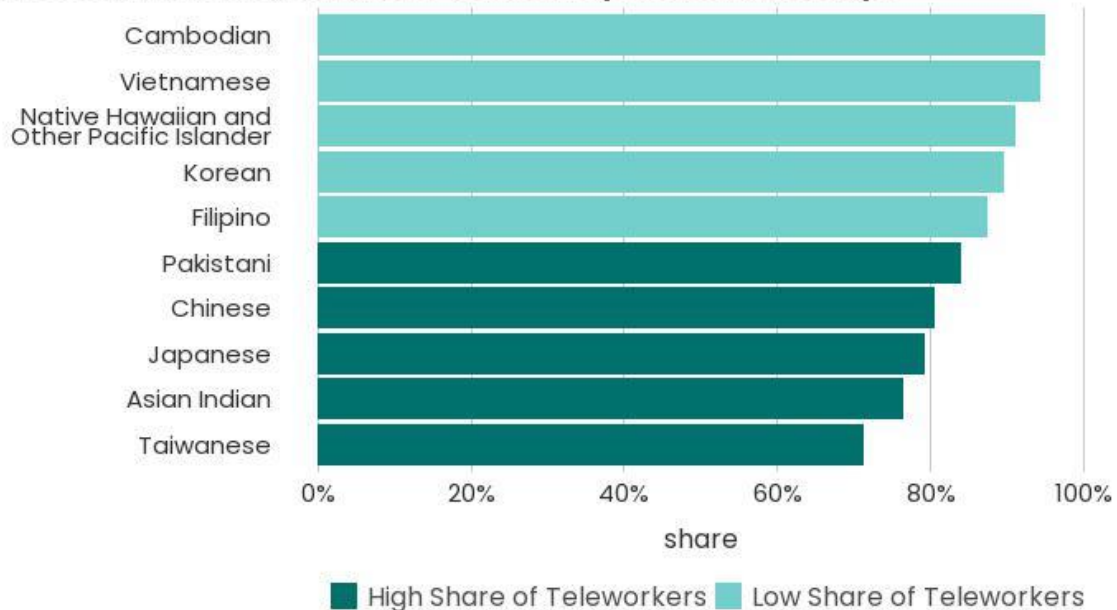
AAPI Transit Commute Mode Share by County



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 2021 1-Year Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) Data in King, Kitsap, Pierce and Snohomish counties

In our [AAPI teleworker article](#), we found two distinct levels of teleworking rates for the 10 most populous AAPI groups in the central Puget Sound region. Five groups reported 2021 telework rates at nearly 50% or more, and five other groups reported nearly 25% or less. The same stratification appears to translate to the drive commute mode shares in 2021: the groups with lower shares of teleworkers drove to work at higher rates, and those with higher shares of teleworkers drove to work at lower rates.

Drive Commute Mode Share for 10 Most Populous AAPI Groups



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 2021 1-Year Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) Data in King, Kitsap, Pierce and Snohomish counties

The data shows that the AAPI groups with the fewest telework opportunities are also the most likely to be drive commuters. Driving may create a greater cost burden than other travel modes. This disproportionality is amplified by [differences in median incomes](#) for various AAPI groups. The groups with the fewest telework opportunities earn lower wages than the groups with the highest telework opportunities.

In our [teleworker report](#), we considered PSRC's [Opportunity Mapping](#), which measures access to transportation among other access indicators, and [previous work](#) examining where different AAPI communities are concentrated. Threading those pieces of work together suggests that there may be a relationship between AAPI telework rates and access to opportunities. The analyses on commute mode shares, presented above, reinforce that there is a diversity of experiences within the AAPI community and that different groups may face different barriers and have different employment opportunities.

Without diving deeper into the data, it would be easy to generalize the AAPI community as a monolith. When planning for racial equity, we need to consider the diversity of where people live and where they come from and look beneath the surface of regional medians and averages. This consideration allows PSRC to identify inequity otherwise concealed by broader trends. [Download the data used in this Trend.](#)