City of Santa Rosa
Downtown Parking Management Study
Engagement Summary Report
August 5, 2025

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarizes an early phase of public outreach conducted by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission and its consultant teams for the Santa Rosa Downtown Parking Plan. Outreach was conducted through three virtual focus groups with Santa Rosa businesses and the community, as well as a survey available online and on paper, in both English and Spanish.

The goal of the plan is to identify parking management strategies to achieve an efficient balance between City funding, future parking demand, new housing and other infrastructure projects, and promoting multi-modal travel.

A comprehensive outreach approach was implemented to identify parking needs, perspectives, and gaps to inform the project team of their approach to parking strategy recommendations.

The outreach methodology incorporated two key components:

- An online public Survey (English & Spanish) was distributed through a digital platform. Printed surveys were available upon request.
- Virtual Focus Groups targeting the business community and downtown business owners to share information about the study and initial demand analysis as well as capturing their distinct parking needs and perspectives.

This community engagement process yielded valuable data and information which will serve as key inputs to the development of parking strategy recommendations. Several key themes emerged across both the focus groups and survey results:

- Parking availability & proximity to destinations
- Parking costs
- Safety concerns

Detailed analysis of focus group feedback and survey responses is provided in the summary that follows.

COMMUNITY SURVEY

A survey was conducted from July 31 to September 12, 2024, to gather public input from the downtown Santa Rosa community. The survey was available online and on paper, in English and Spanish. The survey aimed to inform parking recommendations by collecting feedback on Downtown visit frequency, parking experiences, preferences and trade-offs, community connection, and optional demographic information.

Survey participation was promoted through a coordinated outreach strategy, including:

- Inclusion in the City's e-newsletter
- Distribution of flyers (in English and Spanish) with a QR code linking to the survey
- Distribution of postcards (in English and Spanish) with a QR code linking to the survey
- Digital promotion of the survey through the City website and social media channels

Participants

A total of 1572 individuals completed the survey. The average completion rate was 83%. 56% of respondents reported that they were aged 55 or older, 78% were white, and 60% were women. The majority (74%) reported owning their own home. Regarding their relationship to Downtown Santa Rosa, 15% (280 respondents) work downtown, 13% (249 respondents) live there, and a smaller share—just 4.4% (81 respondents)—own a business downtown. The vast majority, however, engage with the area as visitors, with 83% (1,557 respondents) indicating they visit Downtown Santa Rosa to shop or dine.

Summary of Key Findings

The survey data has been analyzed and categorized into key thematic areas, which are summarized below:

Frequency and Timing of Visits Downtown

Findings:

- 25% visit downtown monthly, 24% visit weekly, 19% visit a few times a year, 17% visit several times a week, 9% visit daily, 5.5% rarely or never visit
- The majority of respondents visit downtown Santa Rosa on weekday (56%) and weekend afternoons (52%), with the fewest visits being on weekend mornings (29%)

Downtown Likes and Dislikes

Findings:

- 32% like the restaurants and food options, while only 12% like the accessibility and walkability of downtown
- The majority of respondents (47%) cited parking problems as a main issue downtown

Potential Enhancements to downtown Santa Rosa

Findings:

- Many respondents cited improvements to cleanliness and maintenance as very/extremely important (76%)
- 62% felt that better parking experiences were extremely/very important

Travel & Parking Behavior

Findings:

- 89% travel by car; 31% walk, 21% bike, and only 8% use transit
- 71% use metered on-street parking, 52% use public parking garages

Parking Priorities

Findings:

- Distance to destination and parking space availability were main priorities for 23% and 22% of respondents
- Safety and security (20%) as well as price (17%) were also main priorities

Downtown Parking Satisfaction

Findings:

- Respondents were largely not at all/slightly satisfied with price (53%) and availability of parking spaces (43%)
- 23% of respondents marked very or extreme satisfaction with availability of parking spaces

FOCUS GROUPS

Three distinct forty-five-minute Virtual Focus Groups were conducted targeted to the downtown business community and business owners to seek comprehensive business stakeholder representation:

- Virtual Focus Group 1: Held on September 16 from 12:00PM – 12:45PM via Teams
- Virtual Focus Group 2: Held on September 18 from 12:00PM – 12:45PM via Teams
- Virtual Focus Group 3: Held on September 20 from 8:30AM – 9:15AM via Teams

All sessions started with introductions, followed by an overview of the survey findings via a PowerPoint presentation, followed by a 30-minute Q&A discussion session. Participants were encouraged to share strengths, challenges, and suggestions regarding parking in downtown Santa Rosa and presented with questions.

A summary of Focus Group participation is as follows:

Date	Meeting Method	Attendees	Organizations Represented
Sept. 16, 2024	Virtual Focus Group 1	6	• Cal Luggage • John Stewart Company • The Santa Rosa Downtown District • Simon Property Group • The Historic Railroad Square Association • 420 Mendocino
Sept.18, 2024	Virtual Focus Group 2	1	• California Welcome Center at the Santa Rosa Metro Chamber
Sept. 20, 2024	Virtual Focus Group 3	2	• Downtown print shop owner • Local developer living downtown

Summary of Key Themes

The goal of the focus groups was to understand parking needs and priorities that were highlighted in the survey. After providing an overview of the study via a PowerPoint presentation, participants were asked about potential challenges, priorities, and hopes for the future of parking in downtown Santa Rosa.

The following overarching themes emerged from the series of virtual focus groups:

Parking Availability

- Strengths: Downtown has a variety of parking options, including parking garages and street parking, which help accommodate employees and visitors.
- Challenges**:** Participants noted difficulties with finding available parking, especially near businesses and during peak times. Construction workers taking up spaces early in the day also impact availability.
- Participant Suggestions: Consider expanding parking availability in high-demand areas, especially with the growth in residential and business developments.

Pricing and Payment Systems

- Strengths: The city generates revenue from metered parking and uses mobile apps like Passport for payments.
- Challenges: Confusion around inconsistent pricing, limited hours for metered parking, and dissatisfaction with the cost, particularly for longer stays and for employees who have to park regularly.
  Participant Suggestions: Simplify pricing across different parking areas and consider free or discounted parking for shorter stays or for employees. Rethink the meter system, possibly offering an initial period of free parking.

Employee and Long-Term Parking

- Challenges: Employees find it difficult to access affordable long-term parking. Business owners pay high costs for employee parking, and some employees are forced to park far from their workplaces.

- Participant Suggestions: Reintroduce discounted parking options for employees, especially in underutilized areas like the upper floors of garages. Create clearer systems for long-term parking that cater to both employees and SMART train riders

Confusion and Signage

- Challenges: Visitors, especially seniors, find parking signage unclear, particularly around the use of kiosks and long-term parking options. Many participants noted frustration with inconsistent parking rules across different zones.
- Participant Suggestions: Improve signage and communication around parking locations, time limits, and how to use payment kiosks. Provide clearer guidance for SMART train riders and visitors to reduce confusion.

Parking Validation and Incentives

- Challenges: Few businesses offer parking validation, which could help drive more foot traffic to downtown. There is also a lack of incentives for employees to use parking garages instead of occupying street parking.
- Participant Suggestions: Introduce a citywide parking validation program in partnership with businesses to encourage more visitors. Provide incentives for employees to use garages rather than street parking to free up spaces for shoppers.

Safety Concerns

- Challenges: Safety in parking garages, particularly at night, was a significant concern, with reports of homeless individuals, car break-ins, and poor lighting.
- Participant Suggestions: Improve lighting and security in parking garages and around parking areas. Increase safety measures to make downtown parking more comfortable for both employees and visitors, especially during the evening.

Houselessness and Cleanliness

- Challenges: Participants noted that unhoused individuals often occupy parking spaces or leave trash, negatively impacting the perception of safety and cleanliness in downtown areas.
- Participant Suggestions: Work on solutions to address homelessness in parking areas while ensuring cleanliness and a positive experience for visitors and customers.

Integration with Transit

- Strengths: The SMART train is a valuable asset for reducing parking demand and encouraging public transit use.
- Challenges: The current parking options near SMART stations are not well integrated, with long walks and insufficient parking solutions for riders.
- Participant Suggestions: Create more convenient long-term parking options for SMART train riders and better integrate these with downtown transit services to encourage multimodal transportation.

Construction and Development Impact

- Challenges: Ongoing construction and new developments are placing additional strain on parking resources, as construction workers and future residents will need more parking.
- Participant Suggestions: Plan parking policies to accommodate the growth from developments like the Cannery Project, ensuring that parking supply meets the future demand from both residents and businesses.

Virtual Focus Group 1

Questions and Key Themes

Question 1: What is the City of Santa Rosa doing well with regards to parking?

- Downtown offers plenty of parking options
- Proximity to workplace is important for employees
- Metered parking generates revenue
- Opportunities exist to leverage SMART train ridership by developing long-term, convenient parking solutions near stations
- Partnerships with shopping centers help manage parking

Question 2: What are the primary challenges or pain points that visitors/employees/delivery personnel experience when downtown?

- Confusion about where to park, particularly around proximity
- Issues with the cost and availability of parking
- Inconsistent parking rules and meter limitations (e.g., passport app's 4-hour limit)
- Lack of discounted or long-term parking, especially for SMART train riders
- Absence of parking validation offered by businesses, which could help increase visitor traffic

Question 3: What are your thoughts about the City parking prices?

- Mixed feelings about pricing strategies
- Concerns that parking is treated as a revenue generator rather than supporting retail and foot traffic
- Frustration over reloading meters and parking apps, resulting in reduced parking turnover
- Desire for a simpler and more consistent pricing strategy across the city
- Potential for free or discounted parking for short-term stays

Question 4: How would you like to see parking downtown change? What are your aspirations for parking in downtown?

- Simplified parking system with free initial parking (e.g., an hour or 90 minutes)
- Improved parking programs for employees, with clearer systems for available spots
- Introduction of parking validation options for businesses to attract more visitors
- Reimagined meter system with free initial hours and a fairer payment system

Question 5: How would you like to see downtown change over the coming years?

- Desire for downtown to be more inviting, accessible, and thriving
- Increased foot traffic and development of new stores and housing
- Better integration with SMART train and other transit options for easier access
- Consistency in parking pricing and rules throughout the city

Virtual Focus Group 2

Questions and Key Themes

Question 1: What is the City of Santa Rosa doing well with regards to parking?

- Signage and reserved parking options are provided for events
- Providing the SMART train as a public transit option, and free rides for seniors and kids have increased ridership and decreased the need for driving/parking

Question 2: What are the primary challenges or pain points that visitors/employees/delivery personnel experience when downtown?

- Unclear signage and parking kiosks are challenging for visitors, especially for SMART train riders and seniors
- Reduction of street parking time limits from 6 hours to 3 hours has caused concern among businesses and visitors
- Limited parking near the SMART train is challenging for seniors with mobility issues
- Limited parking for volunteers and employees at the visitor's center creates difficulties
- Parking availability for visitors and customers can be affected by individuals living in cars/RVs taking up parking spaces

Question 3: What are your thoughts about the City parking prices?

- There is a general understanding of the need to charge for parking, but clearer communication is needed regarding alternative parking options and how to use the kiosks
- Inconsistent pricing, especially in lots like the one near Railroad Square Welcome Center, causes confusion and suggests the need for better utilization strategies

Question 4: How would you like to see parking downtown change? What are your aspirations for parking in downtown?

- Improving signage and communication to help visitors, especially seniors, find long-term parking and understand kiosks
- Planning for increased foot and bike traffic is crucial, considering population growth and developments like the John Stewart Cannery Project
- Adjusting time limits to balance parking turnover and dwell time, possibly reducing the current 3-hour limit to 2 hours, could improve availability

Question 5: How would you like to see downtown change over the coming years?

- Sidewalk and safety improvements are needed, especially on Wilson St. between 3rd and 4th streets, where high foot and bike traffic occurs
- Affordable housing developments like the John Stewart Cannery Project will increase the demand for parking and foot traffic, requiring policies that balance housing, parking, and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure

Virtual Focus Group 3

Questions and Key Themes

Question 1: What is the City of Santa Rosa doing well with regards to parking?

- City parking management balancing financial solvency with customer service and supporting downtown economic development
- Engaging with residents on parking issues, as evidenced by the city receiving 1600 survey responses
- Additional parking was opened on Mendocino, though challenges remain with lane reduction and bike paths
- Parking availability increased in some areas, like the lot behind Russian River, due to economic factors, showing that parking isn't scarce in all parts of downtown

Question 2: What are the primary challenges or pain points that visitors/employees/delivery personnel experience when downtown?

- Difficulty finding parking, especially in the mornings when construction workers occupy spots, limiting spaces on streets like 5th and 4th
- Concerns about safety in parking garages, particularly at night, due to interactions with homeless individuals and car break-ins
- High costs for employee parking, with a desire for discounted parking options in less-used garage areas like the 4th floor or roof
- Trash left by unhoused individuals affects both businesses and customers, contributing to negative perceptions of downtown
- Lack of short-term parking options for quick errands and deliveries adds to parking challenges
- Concern over where future residents and construction workers will park with new developments offering fewer parking spaces than needed

Question 3: What are your thoughts about the City parking prices?

- Availability of parking spaces is the main concern for businesses, not the cost
- Businesses are paying significant amounts for employee parking, and more affordable options are desired
- New developments, particularly in Railroad Square, offer fewer parking spaces per unit, which could impact downtown parking availability and pricing

Question 4: How would you like to see parking downtown change?

- Explore moving employee parking off the streets and into underutilized garage areas like the 4th floor or roof
- Provide more short-term parking options for quick deliveries and customer stops
- Improve lighting around parking garages and streets to enhance safety, especially at night
- Rebuild the 7th Street garage to add more parking spaces
- Provide better infrastructure, such as grocery stores and safer parking, to support the downtown community

Question 5: How would you like to see downtown change over the coming years?

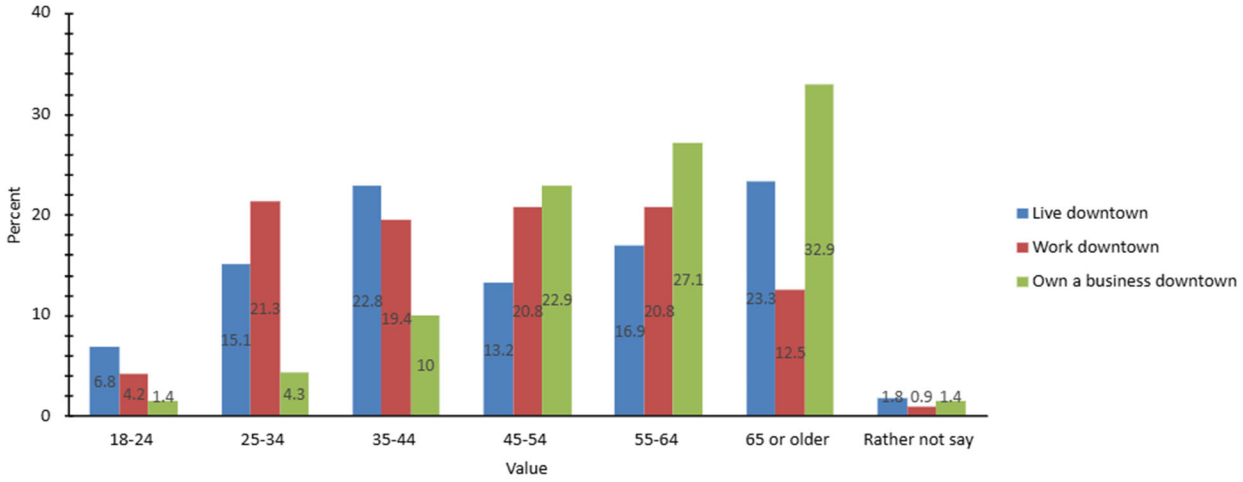
- Diversifying the mix of businesses, beyond service-oriented ones, would make downtown more attractive
- Reinstating employee parking discounts and improving short-term parking would make downtown more accessible for businesses and customers
- Addressing safety and cleanliness concerns, especially regarding the impact of homelessness on downtown's perception
- Planning and coordination for parking and safety infrastructure is needed in new developments to ensure business and employees don't continue to face safety and parking availability challenges

APPENDIX A: DETAILED SURVEY RESULTS

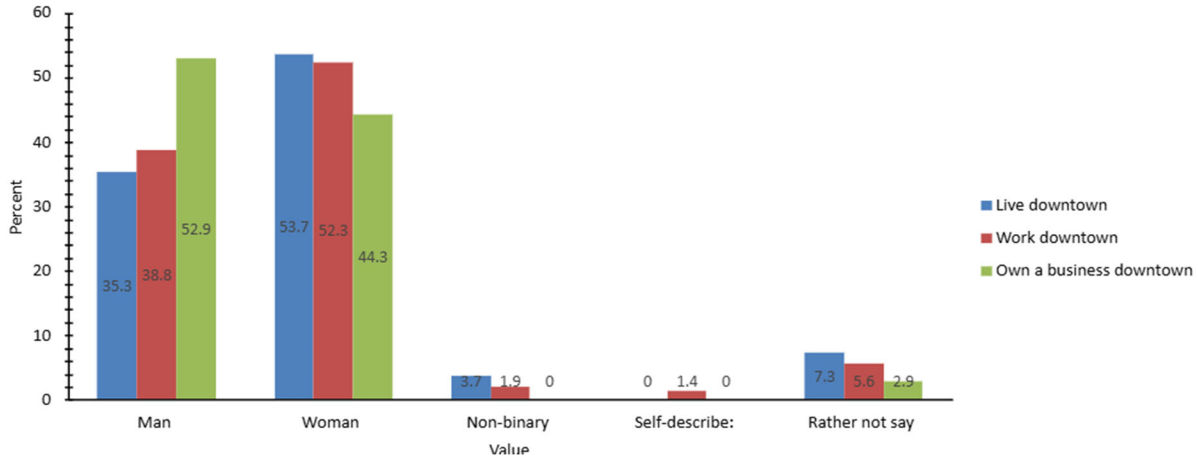
Below are the detailed response percentages, main findings, and segment spotlights from the survey question analysis.

Participant Demographics

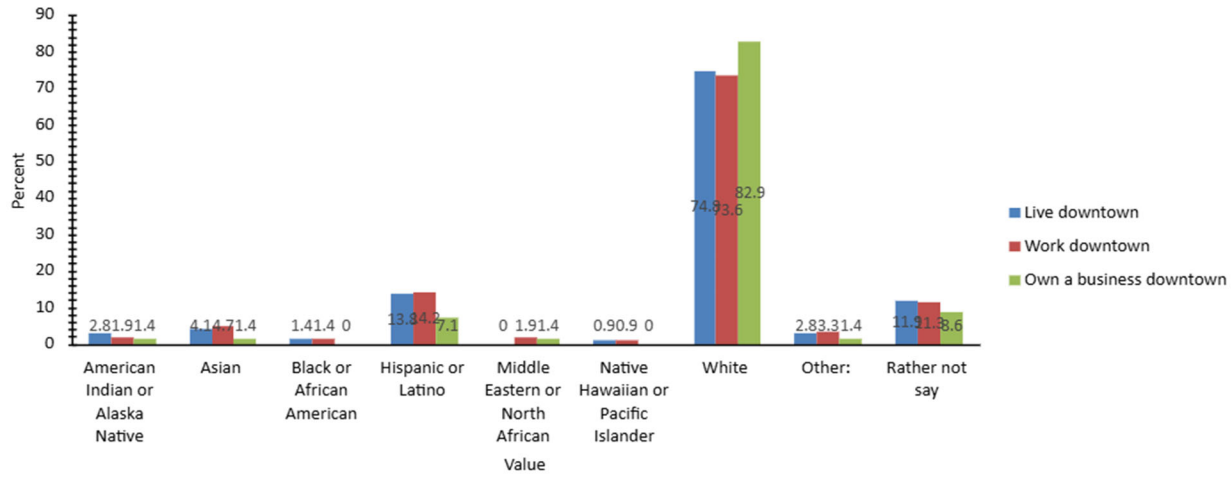
What is your age?



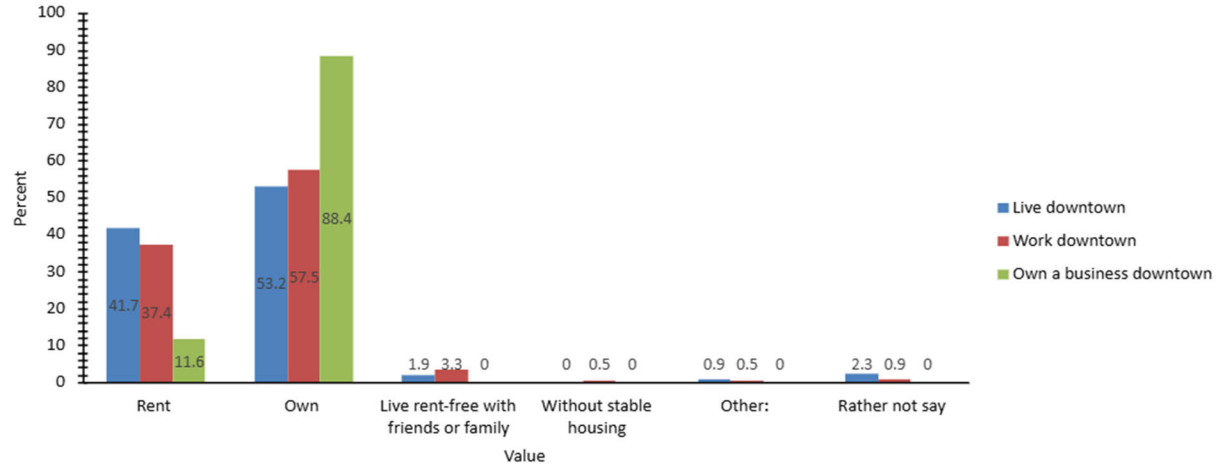
How do you identify?



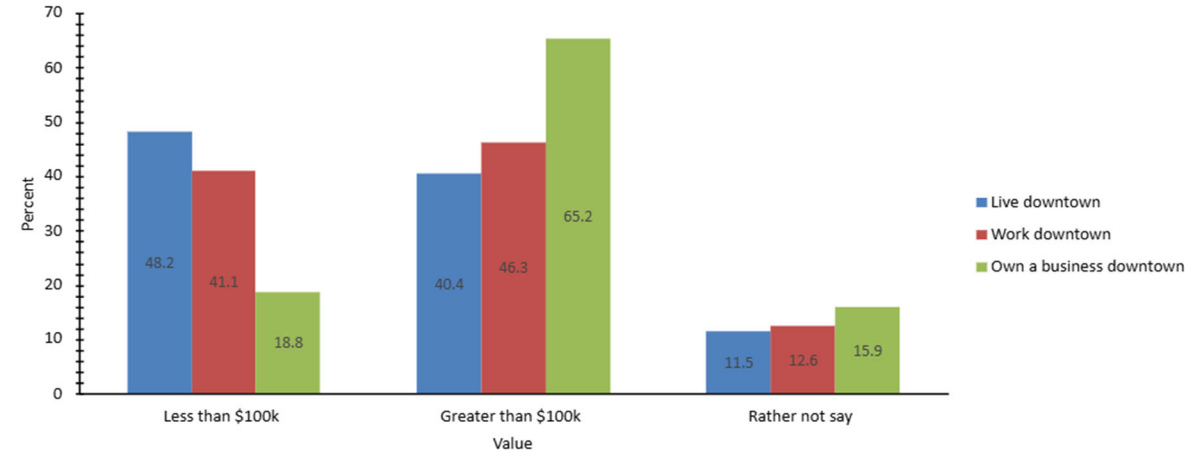
What is your race or ethnicity?



What best describes your current housing?

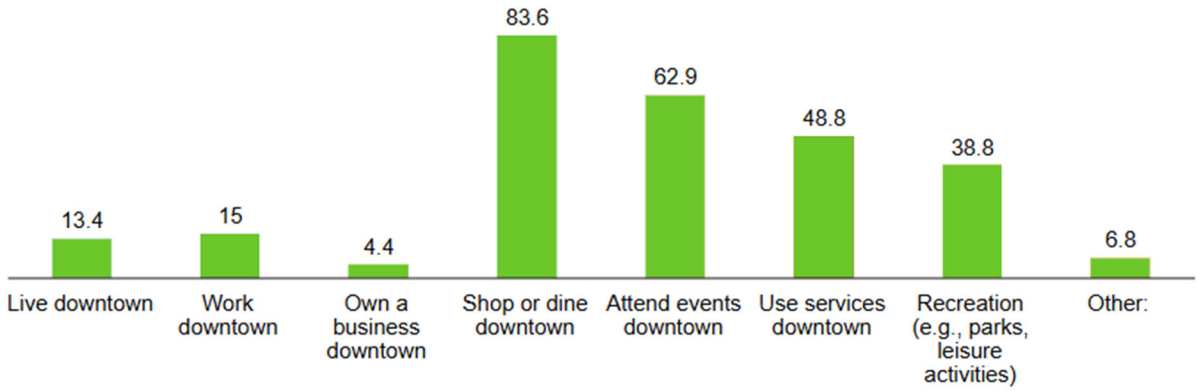


What was your 2023 household income before taxes?

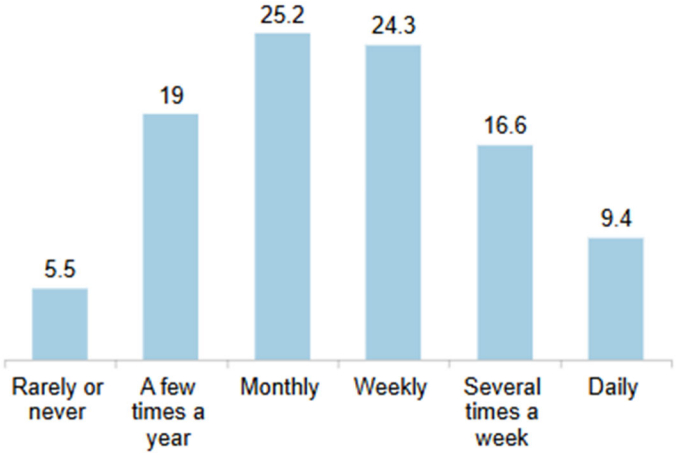


Travel Behavior

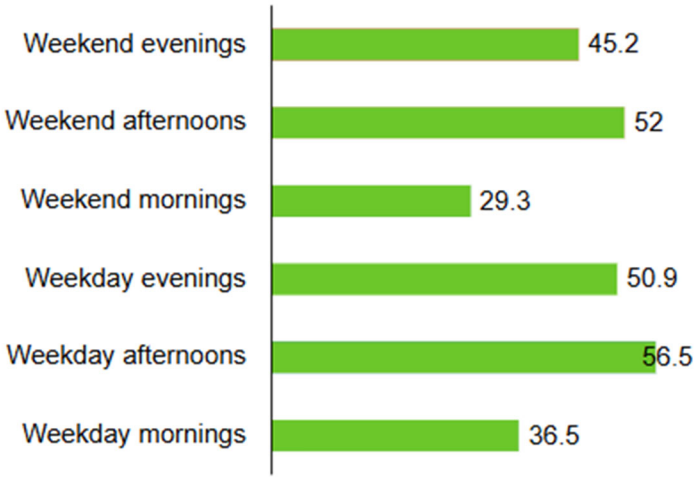
What is your connection to downtown Santa Rosa?



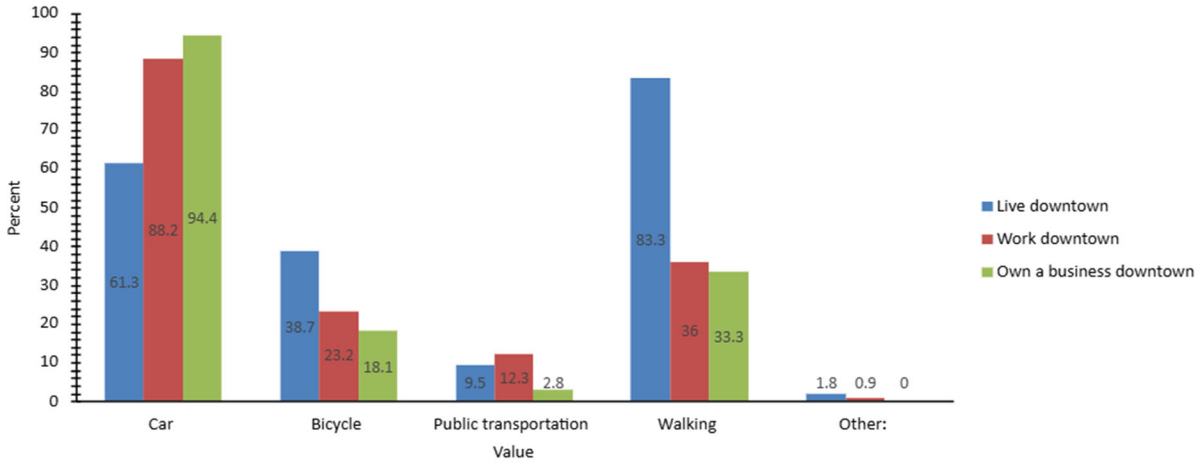
How often do you visit downtown Santa Rosa?



When do you typically visit downtown Santa Rosa?

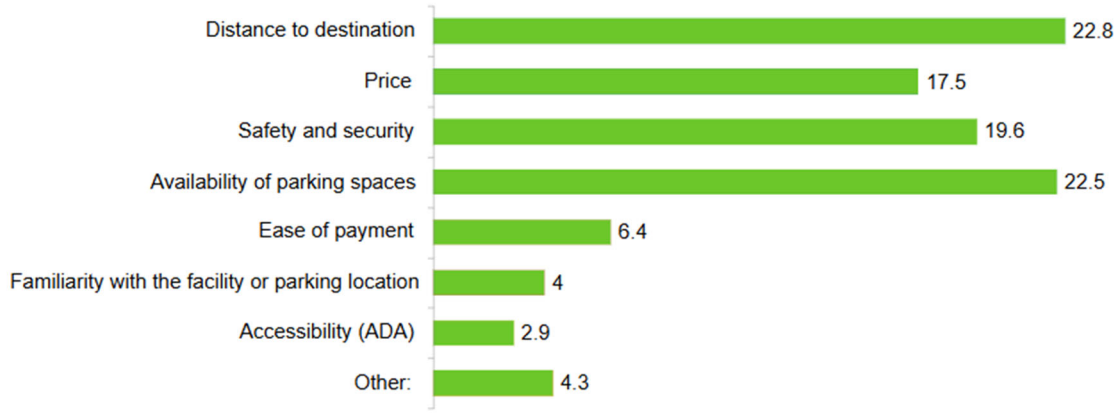


How do you typically travel to downtown Santa Rosa?



Parking

What is your main priority when it comes to parking?

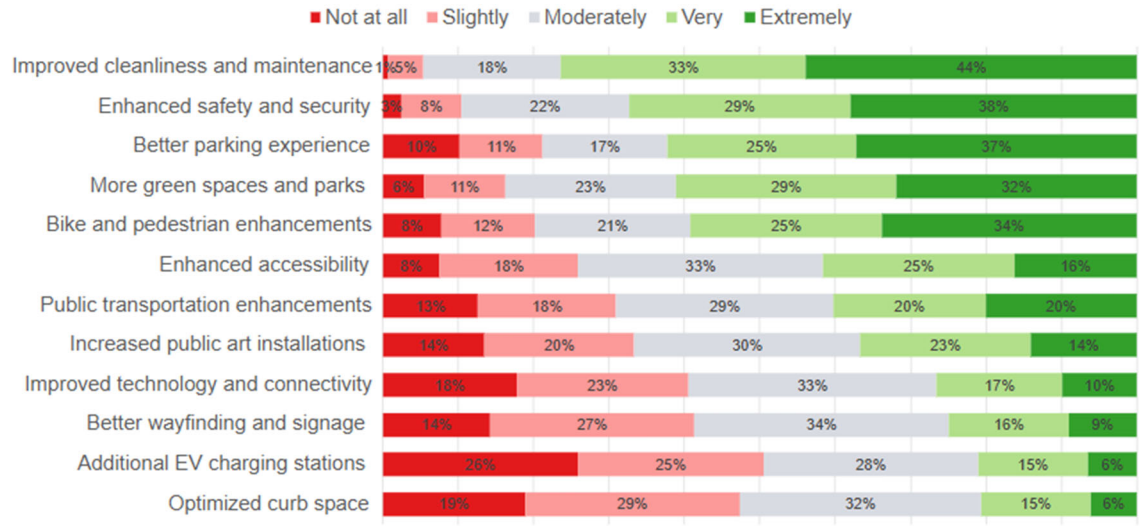


How satisfied are you with the following aspects of parking downtown?

	Not at all satisfied	Slightly satisfied	Moderately satisfied	Very satisfied	Extremely satisfied	Not sure	Not at all/ Slightly satisfied	Very/ Extremely satisfied
Availability of parking spaces	20.4%	22.8%	31.1%	16.6%	7.1%	1.9%	43.2%	23.7%
Safety and security	14.1%	22.3%	39.0%	17.0%	3.5%	4.0%	36.4%	20.5%
Price	35.2%	18.3%	23.8%	12.9%	5.1%	4.8%	53.5%	18.0%
Passport mobile payment app	20.4%	12.0%	15.5%	9.8%	5.0%	37.4%	32.4%	14.8%
Accessibility (ADA)	5.8%	11.0%	21.5%	9.8%	4.3%	47.6%	16.8%	14.1%
Availability of EV chargers	10.5%	8.8%	12.6%	4.7%	5.5%	57.9%	19.3%	10.2%
Availability of short-term parking (Uber/Lyft, food pickup)	13.7%	11.8%	16.4%	6.6%	2.4%	49.0%	25.5%	9.0%

Likes and Dislikes

How important area each of the following potential enhancements for downtown Santa Rosa?



Enhancements (Open-Ended Comments)

What do you like most about downtown Santa Rosa?	What are the main issues you see in downtown Santa Rosa?
Restaurants and Food Options (~32%): • "Variety of restaurants." **Shops and Shopping Experience (~18%):** • "Variety of shops, library, dining, music in the square." • "Being able to window shop." **Events and Community Activities (~11%):** • "Events in the square." • "Community events and gatherings." **Atmosphere and Ambiance (~13%):** • "I like the ambiance and vibe of downtown." • "The historic feel of the square." **Accessibility and Walkability (~12%):** • "I like that I can walk to many places." • "Accessible public spaces."	**Parking Problems (~47%):** • "Parking is a major issue." • "Not enough parking spaces." **Homelessness (~27%):** • "We need solutions for homelessness." **Safety Concerns (~23%):** • "I don't feel safe at night." • "Need better lighting for safety." **Lack of Mixed-Use Development (~19%):** • "We need more mixed-use buildings for shops, offices, and housing." • "Lack of diverse building types." **Maintenance and Cleanliness (~18%):** • "The area needs to be cleaner." • "Buildings look tagged and neglected."