

Federal Highway Administration Survey of How Many People Use Transit

Here is a table showing the percentage of the population that uses transit at least once a month (“monthly”) and at least twenty times a month (“often”), for the top thirty states.

Percentage of Population that Uses Transit Monthly or Regularly by State								
	Uses Transit			Uses Transit:			Uses Transit	
	Monthly	Often		Monthly	Often		Monthly	Often
DC	77	33	WA	23	6.5	HA	11	2.5
NY	47	21	PA	22	7.4	FL	11	2.4
MA	31	6.5	MN	20	3.2	TX	11	2.2
MD	30	8.6	CT	19	2.2	WI	11	1.9
NJ	28	6.7	VA	18	4.4	AZ	10	2.9
IL	26	8.1	DE	15	5.0	NV	10	2.2
OR	23	2.2	RI	15	2.6	AK	10	2.8
UT	23	2.4	NH	14	4.1	ME	9.3	1.1
CA	23	5.4	GA	12	2.2	MI	9.3	2.3
CO	23	4.7	VT	11	2.0	AR	9.0	3.9

SOURCE: Gray Kimbrough, based on the National Household Travel Survey of 2009. “Often” refers to the percentage of people who used transit at least 20 times in the survey month.

According to the [Federal Highway Administration](#),

The 2009 National Household Travel Survey (NHTS) provides information to assist transportation planners and policy makers who need comprehensive data on travel and transportation patterns in the United States....

The NHTS/NPTS serves as the nation’s inventory of daily travel. Data is collected on daily trips taken in a 24-hour period, and includes:

- purpose of the trip (work, shopping, etc.);
- means of transportation used (car, bus, subway, walk, etc.);
- how long the trip took, i.e., travel time;
- time of day when the trip took place;
- day of week when the trip took place; and
- if a private vehicle trip:
 - number of people in the vehicle , i.e., vehicle occupancy;
 - driver characteristics (age, sex, worker status, education level, etc.); and
 - vehicle attributes (make, model, model year, amount of miles driven in a year).

Because of the emphasis on daily trips in a 24-hour period, it is easy to overlook that this survey also provides information that is useful for distinguishing mode share from how many people use transit. But FHA also points out that “the 2009 NHTS data set includes, but is not limited to...the typical number of transit, walk and bike trips made over a period longer than the 24-hour travel day.”

The NHTS surveyed 150,147 households, and makes the raw data from the survey available (stripped of information that might be used to identify the participants). That's important, because the official reports mostly offer results only at the national level, even though the sample size is large enough to obtain valid results at the state level. The documentation is somewhat difficult to follow for a first-time user of the data, but fortunately Gray Kimbrough, a regular contributor to Greatergreaterwashington, has extensive familiarity with this data set and the weights needed to make appropriate inferences from this stratified sample.

Kimbrough found that using the appropriate weights, 30% of MD residents aged 16 and above report having used transit in the previous month, with a 95% confidence interval of 5 percentage points. He also points out that if he excludes those without a valid answer to the question, he derives a result of 36%, plus or minus 6%. The former result, however, is more defensible, implying that 25 to 35% of Marylanders used transit at least once a month during 2009.

We are grateful to a commenter known as "Uptowner" on the greatergreaterwashington.org website who initially brought this to our attention.