

Regional On-Board Transit Survey

SEMCOG, in partnership with the Regional Transit Authority for Southeast Michigan and the region's transit providers conducted a regional on-board transit survey of all the fixed-route transit systems in Southeast Michigan from October 2018 to mid-2019. Approximately 18,000 riders were surveyed in the region, riding at various times during weekdays on the region's eight transit systems:

- [Detroit Department of Transportation \(DDOT\)](#)
- [Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation \(SMART\)](#)
- [Ann Arbor Area Transportation Authority \(TheRide\)](#)
- [University of Michigan \(UM\)](#)
- [OLINE](#)
- [Detroit People Mover \(DPM\)](#)
- [Blue Water Area Transit \(BWAT\)](#)
- [Lake Erie Transit \(LET\)](#)

The last regional on-board transit survey was conducted in 2009, and since then, significant economic, land use, and transit system changes have occurred. Furthermore, the region has had a lot of interest in expanding rapid transit services, making the need for more up-to-date transit travel information even more critical.

The information collected provides valuable information on travel patterns and demographics of transit riders, as well as transit service characteristics, and is extremely important for regional transit planning and the transportation investment decision-making process. Along with providing key input for transportation plans at SEMCOG, current data will make the region more competitive for federal transit funding when it becomes available. Some of the information obtained will be origin, destination, demographics (including vehicle availability and household income), access and egress modes, and public transit use.

Riders were surveyed on vehicles through an interviewer with a computer tablet. A database was developed to display data by selected categories (route, time-of-day, etc.) and by output type (queries, tables, etc.). The final report posted on the website. Links to the last Transit On-Board Survey Report and Frequently Asked Questions are below. For more information, please contact [Alex Bourgeau](#), SEMCOG Transportation Modeling And Mobility.

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Frequently Asked Questions

What is SEMCOG?

SEMCOG, the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, is a membership organization of local governments and the region's designated Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO). As an MPO, SEMCOG is responsible for regional transportation planning, including the region's transit system. In its effort to improve the mobility of all people, SEMCOG works to help public and private transportation providers meet the mobility needs of the people and communities they service. For more information on SEMCOG, [click here](#).

What is the purpose of the On-Board Transit Survey and how is the data used?

The On-Board Transit Survey is used to help Southeast Michigan plan for improved transit infrastructure and service. Your responses help SEMCOG and its partners better understand the travel patterns and choices of transit riders. This also helps planners and decision-makers make more effective improvements and better service transit riders.

How often are these studies performed, and why now?

On-board transit passenger studies are typically conducted every few years. The region's last survey was conducted in 2009. Since that time, our region has changed – transit systems and operations have been added and modified, populations and major employers have moved within the region, and new technology has been added. As a result, people have changed where, when, and how they make their trips, including their use of transit.

Who conducts the study?

This study is conducted by SEMCOG, in partnership with the area's transportation providers:

- Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT)
- Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART)
- The Detroit People Mover
- QLINE
- Ann Arbor Area Transportation Authority (TheRide)
- University of Michigan
- Lake Erie Transit
- Blue Water Area Transit

A contractor was hired by SEMCOG to conduct the On-Board Transit Survey. The people you see on the bus administering the surveys are contracted employees. The data, however, belongs to SEMCOG and its transit partners.

How was the survey conducted?

Interviewers with tablet computers randomly select passengers to take the survey. The tablet tells the interviewer who to pick based on a random number formula. Random selection is necessary to ensure that the data are statistically valid. For some routes, survey staff distributed a paper version of the survey in order for the passenger to self-complete the survey and return the filled-out questionnaire back to the surveyor on the bus.

How long did it take to complete a survey?

An individual survey will take five to seven minutes to complete.

Why do you need to ask about personal information such as income? What does that have to do with how I use transit?

SEMCOG is required to collect specific demographic data about passengers including race, household income, and language proficiency in order to comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This information is submitted to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) approximately every five years. Also, studies have shown that certain household characteristics, such as income, are key indicators of travel behavior. By understanding these relationships, planners are better able to predict how recommended service improvements will perform.

Please keep in mind that personal information is removed from all records and the results are aggregated, a measure that ensures your privacy and anonymity.

What if I am asked to participate in the survey more than once?

If you are selected more than once, we would appreciate your participation each time you are selected.

Transit providers conduct their own surveys, how is this one different?

Many of our transit partners conduct surveys that are independent of this regional On-Board Transit Survey and often ask some of the same questions. However, this survey is done on ALL of the eight providers in the region to provide a comprehensive understanding of transit travel in the region and is independent of any other surveys

How did riders know that an interviewer is legitimate?

Official survey staff members wear a uniform consisting of a blue vest and an official surveyor badge. They carry tablet computers and will never ask for information such as your social security number or bank account information.

Was the survey available online?

No. Since the survey asks about the specific transit trip, only passengers who are on transit on the survey day were selected for interviews.

Are people with disabilities included in the survey?

Yes. All persons riding transit during the survey period are included in the random selection methodology. Interviewers can assist customers with disabilities in completing the survey or provide the option to complete it later by phone.

Is the survey available in other languages?

Yes. Bilingual staff were available on transit where they are most likely to be needed. Additionally, customers speaking other languages could choose to complete the survey later by phone in their respective language.

How will these data be reported?

Published reports will summarize the survey data, but will not disclose Personally Identifiable Information (PII).

How do I access the data or the final findings?

A summary report is available [here](#).

Is data shared with or sold to anyone other than SEMCOG and its transit partners?

No. To ensure the anonymity of survey respondents, personal information is not included in the final data files.

How will the providers use the information?

This information will allow transit providers to implement enhancements to the system that make it more effective, reliable, and efficient. The ultimate goal is to better meet travelers' needs.

Who is paid for the survey?

SEMCOG receives transportation planning funds from the federal government that were used to pay for the survey.

How do I know that my personal information is safe?

The survey consultant and SEMCOG are required to protect the confidentiality of personally identifiable information (PII). Key provisions include storing PII on secure computers, protecting it from unauthorized use, and destroying PII after an agreed-upon time period.

Also, as previously noted, published reports will summarize the survey data, but will not disclose PII.

Who can I contact to get more information on the study?

[Alex Bourgeau](#), SEMCOG Transportation Modeling And Mobility