



A Survey of Workers at Denver International Airport



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Denver International Airport: Survey of Workers

Twenty-three miles Northeast of Downtown Denver, we find Denver International Airport (DIA). A soon to be metropolis unto itself, DIA has over 30,000 employees working daily to provide safe, comfortable and pleasant experiences for those traveling to and from Colorado. The commuting and working experience of these 30,000 employees is the focus of this survey research in which 211 workers at DIA responded to questions about their work life and daily commuting experience. Primary findings of the survey research are as follows:

- **The costs are greatest for those who make less:** Daily commuting costs for those who make less than \$37,000 per year are \$7.00 or more for 60 percent of respondents. For those who make more than \$53,000 per year the percent paying \$7.00 or more drops to 43 percent.
- **Few pay for parking, while the majority pay for an EcoPass:** Of the almost 60 percent who receive a parking pass, 8 percent pay for it. In contrast, of the 59 percent who receive an EcoPass, 54 percent pay for it.
- **Those who make less are charged more for parking passes:** Of the 60 percent who receive a parking pass, 19 percent of those who make under \$45,000 pay more than \$10 a month for their parking pass. For those who make \$60,000 or more, only 4 percent pay for their parking pass at all, and none pay more than \$40.
- **Employer-sponsored incentive programs favor driving:** For those who make \$60,000 or more, a little over half are offered an EcoPass, while close to 90 percent are given a parking pass, which only 3 percent pay for.
- **Cost is named as a primary factor in commuting decisions:** All of the respondents and demographics identify cost as a primary factor in their commuting decision choices. The only exception to this is for respondents that drive alone to work.
- **Transportation for very low-income workers (\$25,000 annually and less) is unaffordable:** Fifty-five percent of this demographic are 18-34 years old, and 68 percent are African American (7 percent White). 94 percent do not receive a parking pass and 58 percent are not provided an EcoPass. Fifty-percent pay \$10 or more per day in commuting costs.
- **Families ride public transit together, but do not drive together:** Of the respondents answering in the affirmative to traveling with members of their family, only 12 percent drive together, whereas 83 percent ride public transportation together.

Recommendations:

1. **Work with the City of Denver and RTD to create a Transportation Management Agency (TMA) at Denver International Airport:** Many areas throughout the Denver metro region have business centers supported by transportation management agencies. These agencies operate as membership organizations with the ultimate goal of creating greater access to standard and alternative public transportation options for employees and employers. A DIA, a TMA could be a central advocate for all the transportation needs of those working at the airport and thus could also implement many of the following programmatic recommendations.
2. **Create a TMA and/or employer-sponsored car pool program:** For those whom public transportation is not an option, driving alone should not be the most affordable and only alternative. The current incentive program for those driving could be modified to reflect new economically beneficial and environmentally positive priorities. By attaching a small fee to all parking passes for employees, the high number of single occupancy vehicles arriving at the airport daily could be reduced. This fee would be waived if drivers either carpooled or met a low-income requirement. Further incentives of this type of program could include, better parking locations, cheaper or no cost passes, and cash incentives.
3. **Improve access to EcoPass programs:** While many do receive an EcoPass, some industries at DIA are missing out on this benefit. Of those who do not receive an EcoPass: 28 percent work in the professional and technical services, 21percent work in maintenance, and 17 percent work in transportation. When you compare this to who rides RTD, the numbers reflect that those who do not receive a pass, choose to drive instead of ride. If the businesses operating at the airport were allowed to pool their EcoPass programs together, they would likely reduce their overall program costs. Upon pooling the current passes, other employers at the airport could be encouraged to join in on the pass program. The pooling of passes by larger employers would offer the opportunity for smaller employers to provide passes at a more palatable price, compared to the current all or nothing option RTD now offers.
4. **Increase public transportation to the airport during non-regular work hours.** For some low-income respondents, public transportation is not an option due to cost. The next most often cited reason for not using the bus was schedules. If these schedules better met their needs for commuting habits, they may increase their use of public transportation.
5. **Prioritize EcoPasses for those who make less than \$20,000 per year.** A large majority of respondents currently take public transportation, yet pay the most in total costs relative to other income demographics. Providing EcoPasses to the lowest income workers would make transportation to work more affordable for those who rely on it most.

Denver International Airport Transit and Worker Survey Summary of Findings

Methodology:

The Transit and Worker Survey was conducted between November 9, 2013 and April 23, 2014. Survey distribution was undertaken through a combination of ground canvassing in DIA terminals by FRESC staff and leaders, as well as online surveying through union and DIA worker networks. The survey sample size is 211 persons, with a margin of error of 7 percent at a 95 percent confidence rate. As a result of the survey penetration, the margin of error may fluctuate depending on the demographics being presented.

Demographics:

Of the 211 sampled, the majority identified themselves as male (64 percent), between the ages of 35 and 64 (65 percent). Racial and ethnic identification for the total sample are White, 42 percent; African American, 35 percent; Latino, 14 percent and 10 percent other. Household income distribution for this sample indicate that the majority make less than \$60,000 per year (59 percent), with 91 percent working between 30 and 50 hours per week on a regular schedule. The largest income groupings are \$20,000-\$45,000 (30 percent) and \$80,001-\$120,000 (23 percent).

A Tale of Two Workers

While the numbers illustrate many broad trends and experiences of the respondents, two individual's stories help to illustrate the human impact of the current policies and trends. Respondent A is a Latino female who is under the age of 34. She begins her 20-40 minute drive at her rental home, which is 2-5 blocks from her nearest bus stop. She chooses to drive instead of riding the bus because the transit schedule, reliability and cost are failing to meet her needs. She does not receive a bus pass, but does receive a parking pass and so therefore has a greater incentive to drive. Her daily commuting costs with this parking pass exceeds \$7 dollars. Respondent B is a white male, over the age of 50. He drives to work each day, commuting 40-60 minutes each way from a home that he owns. He is provided with a free parking pass as well as an EcoPass (which he currently does not use), even though he lives within 5 blocks of his nearest transit stop. His salary is greater than \$80,000 per year, which he earns in four days of work at 30-40 hours per week. He owns his home and spends less than \$10 per day on his commute to work.

Summary of Findings:

Public Transportation Trends

Of the total sample, a significant number of respondents (58 percent) take public transportation, while 50 percent drive alone and 7 percent ride share or carpool. While the majority (54 percent) lives within 5 blocks of the nearest bus and/or transit stop, 23 percent live more than 10 blocks from their nearest stops. A marginal 10 percent of respondents are unsure of their proximity to transit.

Interestingly, an approximately equal number of those surveyed received an EcoPass or a parking pass. Fifty-nine percent of respondents stated that they are provided with an EcoPass, 46 percent of whom receive it for free, and 54 percent pay \$10 or more per month. Of those who receive a parking pass (59 percent of all respondents), 92 percent of those receive their parking pass for free. For those who receive neither, an EcoPass, nor a parking pass, 48 percent pay \$7 or more, 31 percent of whom pay \$10 or more per day.

Industry identification shows that those who work in security, transportation and professional and technical services make up 54 percent of those who ride public transportation. Those who show the least transportation ridership include maintenance 2 percent, direct supervision 2 percent, and retail 5 percent.

Of those who ride public transportation the top three factors that impact their transportation choice are: cost (52 percent), work schedule (51 percent) and reliability (46 percent). In order for those who currently drive to begin taking public transportation the three factors that need to change are: transit schedule (48 percent), bus stops and routes (42 percent) and cost (37 percent). Awareness of the east line light rail is extremely high with 93 percent of respondents aware of its existence and timeline, and 46 percent planning to use the line. High percentages (38 percent) are unsure of their plans to use the line while only 17 percent responded with a hard "no." The average commute times to work are between 20-40 minutes for 44 percent of respondents and 40-60 minutes for 29 percent of respondent.

SkyRide users vs. General RTD riders:

SkyRide is an RTD service that provides bus transportation from Park-n-Ride lots throughout the metro region. When looking at the differences between those who ride the more efficient SkyRide and those who ride the general RTD service to the airport a few differences emerge. Fewer riders of Skyride are low-income compared to the general RTD riders with 65 percent of SkyRide users making less than \$37,500 annually, and 78 percent for general RTD riders making the same. SkyRide services 11 percent more white riders when compared to those riding the general

RTD service to the airport, while both are still predominately used by people of color predominately self-identifying as African American. Those riding SkyRide also cite 'cost' as their primary reason for choosing to use public transportation, while those riding general RTD service state 'work schedule' as their primary factor.

In identifying routes and timing it becomes clear that the RTD routes 169L and 145X (general RTD service routes to the airport) run more infrequent service routes with longer and more varied headways (time between buses). Fortunately these routes offer extended hours for DIA workers who work flexible hours. Those who ride SkyRide also indicate that a greater percent receive free EcoPasses when compared to general riders reporting free EcoPasses. Those riding the general RTD service indicate that they live closer to their nearest bus stop (61 percent within 5 blocks), when compared to those riding SkyRide (47 percent within 5 blocks), which may be a factor in why they choose to ride the general service instead of SkyRide. Another factor when looking at users of these services to consider is that those traveling on SkyRide report longer travel times, over those using general RTD services, but only by a small 3 percent margin.

Driving alone

Workers who drive to work at DIA are mostly wealthier, white males who have decreased commute times to work, longer hourly schedules, and multiple household incomes. Their reasons for driving are informed by greater driving benefits due to greater and cheaper parking pass numbers, with fewer EcoPasses at a greater overall cost.

Those commuting to work alone in a car are majority males (70 percent), who identify as White (59 percent) and are much older than the total sample with 48 percent being between the ages of 50 and 64. This group of workers commutes by car even though a larger percentage of them are living within close proximity to their nearest bus stop – 4 percent live within 5 blocks of their nearest stop. Earnings of these drivers reflect some expected differences, in that they earn more in both total household income, as well as individual earnings. Of drivers, 31 percent earn between \$80,000 and \$120,000 annually (total household income), and half of the respondents earn between \$37,000 and \$73,000 annually. When looking at the earnings of those who drive vs. the total sample, we see a greater variation between the total household income and the income earned from the respondent's job. This would indicate that those choosing to drive carry less of the total financial burden for their household than the rest of the sample.

Those who drive also report a significantly higher, hourly work schedules with 71 percent reporting working 40 and 50 hours, and no one working less than 30 hours. Commute times for our drivers vary a great deal more than they do for the total sample. Drivers seem to be located closer to the airport (based on travel time to work), reflected by 63 percent commuting less than 40 minutes. The benefit incentives for drivers favors their current commuting choice with 80 percent

receiving a parking pass (21 percent more than the total sample) and 89 percent of those receiving a pass for free. Drivers receive fewer EcoPasses compared with the total sample and more drivers pay for these passes, with 52 percent receiving a pass and 65 percent paying for it. Our drivers' responses to the question, asking what it would take for them to ride public transportation indicate that their habits will change if RTD makes changes to: schedules (55 percent), stops and routes (47 percent), and reliability (36 percent). This demographic also indicates a smaller chance of using the East Line in the future with only 29 percent indicating they will ride the line when it opens (46 percent of the total sample said they will ride it).

Workers receiving employer-provided EcoPass

Our EcoPass recipient responses are high, compared with expected outcomes. This is likely due to a high sampling of union workers at the airport, due to FRESC's membership base. Yet there is still room for growth. While many receive the pass, some continue to drive instead of ride the bus. EcoPass costs are being absorbed by employees with the majority paying more than \$10/month for their passes. There is an opportunity for those who receive the pass to increase their ridership with improvements to the transportation schedule and current stops and routes.

For those receiving an EcoPass: 54 percent are male, with age dispersed evenly, similar to the total sample. Ethnicity responses show that 36 percent are White, 41 percent African American, 16 percent Latino, and 5 percent Asian Pacific Islander. The majority of respondents live within 5 blocks of their nearest transit stop: 33 percent of respondents live within 2 blocks of their nearest stop, 20 percent live between 5-10 blocks, and 22 percent live more than 10 blocks away.

Household income responses indicate 47 percent of those with EcoPasses make less than \$45,000 per year, while 35 percent make over \$60,000 a year. Hourly wages show 47 percent of this sample make \$12-\$18 per hour or \$25,501 - \$37,000 annually. Industry identification for EcoPass holders is dispersed throughout many industries with 29 percent working in security, 19 percent working in the professional and technical industries and 13 percent working in the custodial services. The industries reporting low recipients of the EcoPass are retail 4 percent, ground service 3 percent, and direct supervision 2 percent.

Of those provided with an EcoPass, 63 percent indicate that they take public transportation (SkyRide or RTD bus routes) and 44 percent drive alone. Fifty-four percent of respondents are paying more than \$10 per month for their passes (25 percent pay \$25-\$45 per month, and 15 percent pay more than \$40 per month), while 46 percent pay nothing for their pass (compared to 92 percent receiving free parking). Fifty-four percent of respondents also receive a parking pass, which is free for 88 percent of EcoPass recipients. The highest contribution to transportation choice for those who ride public transit is cost (53 percent), followed by work schedule and reliability at a 50 percent response rate. For those driving to work the top three factors that would have to change to encourage public transportation use

are the transit schedule (46 percent), proximity of bus stops and routes (42 percent), and reliability (29 percent).

Trends for household incomes less than \$60,000 per year

Those with household incomes of less than \$60,000 per year are predominately male (59 percent); and under the age of 49 (69 percent). Responses to self-identified ethnicity indicate that 51 percent are African American, 20 percent are Latino, and 5 percent are Asian Pacific Islander. The highest response rates by industry include security (25 percent), transportation (14 percent), ground service (13 percent), and custodial (11 percent). Fifty-seven percent live within five blocks of their nearest transit stop, and 70 percent use public transportation to get to work, while 36 percent drive alone. The majority spend 20-40 minutes commuting to work (49 percent), while 24 percent spend 40-60 minutes commuting. Forty percent receive a parking permit, and 62 percent receive an EcoPass. A high number (64 percent) of those who receive the EcoPass pay nothing for it, while 36 percent pay over \$10 per month for their pass. This demographic sees far less parking benefit compared to the total sample demographics, with 60 percent not receiving a parking pass at all, and a higher than average number of those who do receive a pass, paying for it (16 percent pay \$10 or more).

Highest daily commuting costs for young men of color

The results of this breakout are disheartening as those who seem most burdened by daily commuting costs are young men of color. These men work close to a full-time schedule and likely have a second job or share the financial burden with another earner in the household. The majority of these respondents make 30 percent the average median income for the Denver metro region. They work in industries that report unremarkable EcoPass penetration, yet mostly use public transportation as their primary means of transportation.

Currently those who responded to paying \$7 dollars or more a day for commuting costs (not including EcoPass, nor parking pass) are: majority male (75 percent), fairly young compared to sample as 40 percent are between 18-34 years old, African American (55 percent) or Latino (10 percent), and making a household yearly income of less than \$20,000 per year (55 percent). These respondents work 30-40 hours per week (55 percent), in transportation (40 percent), ground service (35 percent), maintenance (15 percent) and retail or security (5 percent each).

The majority of these respondents take public transportation with 94 percent indicating that they take SkyRide or RTD to work, and only 16 percent indicating that they drive alone. Of the respondents 47 percent spend 20-40 minutes commuting, and 37 percent commute for 40-60 minutes. For those who ride public transportation, the top three factors in their decision making are work schedule (69 percent), proximity of stops and routes (44 percent) and cost (31 percent). For

those who choose to drive the top three factors are cost (64 percent), work (36 percent), and transit schedule (36 percent).

Conclusion:

It is clear from the data in this survey that more research is needed to better understand the commuting habits and patterns of the worker at Denver International Airport. The transportation and income trends in this survey do paint a dire picture, with those making the most money receiving the greatest transportation benefits while those making the least paying the most in commuting costs. While these numbers illustrate some tough realities they also set the foundation for great opportunity and informed decision making in future campaigns. As FRESC continues the work at DIA it will pursue policy and organizing strategies that may lead to an EcoPass and TMA campaign.