

Taking train to work? Neither are they

Metro finds its passengers aren't the traditional train riders

by **Sean Holstege** - Sept. 7, 2009 12:00 AM

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A newly released survey by Metro light-rail planners indicates passengers don't fit the conventional transit-rider mold.

Metro found that only 27 percent of the patrons ride the light rail to and from work. In many large cities, commuters make up the dominant share of riders. The survey found that sports fans, shoppers and people going to and from the airport or cultural events form the largest group.

Other surprises:

- More people take the trains during the middle of the day than during either the traditional morning commute or evening one.
- More people walk, bike or skate to the trains than take buses or drive. Survey personnel didn't ask how far passengers walk.

Less surprising is that two-thirds of riders own cars and one-third had never ridden transit. Light rail was designed to attract riders who won't ride buses.

Metro says the findings justify the placement of the 20-mile line and running trains every 10 minutes between the rush hours.

The starter line connects two city centers, other business districts, schools, colleges, sports venues and shopping centers, giving riders reasons to travel in both directions and during the off-peak.

The findings could help persuade the Federal Transit Administration to help fund the Valley's first rail extension, in Mesa. Historically, the FTA adheres to forecasts that emphasize work trips, but federal transit officials told Metro it would consider the broader results of this study.

The survey was randomly conducted in April among 3,144 passengers in proportion to where people board.

The margin of error was plus or minus 1.96 percentage points.