

4-2007

Greater Grand Rapids Community Survey Briefing

Community Research Institute-Johnson Center

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/jcppubs>

ScholarWorks Citation

Community Research Institute-Johnson Center, "Greater Grand Rapids Community Survey Briefing" (2007). *Research, Reports, and Publications*. 16.
<https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/jcppubs/16>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy at ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Research, Reports, and Publications by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.

Greater Grand Rapids Community Survey Briefing:

Transportation

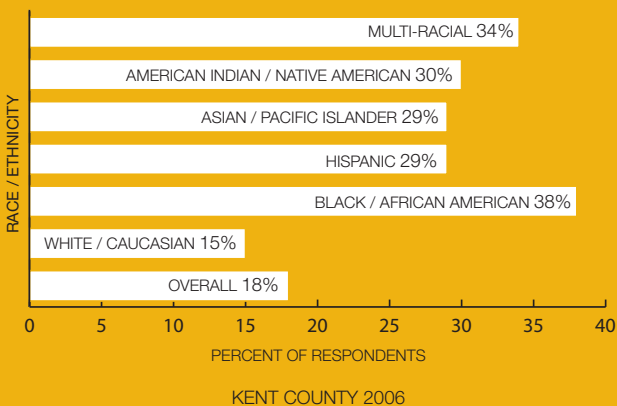


Public Transportation

Public transportation in Kent County is growing incrementally in popularity. The United States Congress has appropriated millions of dollars to improve and expand the greater Grand Rapids public transit systems in the past few years. Local transportation has become increasingly visible with the 2004 opening of The Rapid's environmentally friendly Central Station and the American Public Transportation Association's recognizing The Rapid as the 2004 Outstanding Public Transportation System. Use of public transportation is also increasing; The Rapid provided more than seven million rides during fiscal year 2006—an increase of 15.2% over 2005.

The overall use of public transportation in Kent County, however, may be less than these numbers suggest. According to the 2000 United States Census, 1.1% of Kent County workers age 16 and over used public transit to get to work. Racial/ethnic disparities exist in commuting methods: 5.2% of African American and 2.6% of Hispanic workers utilized public transportation to travel to the jobsite, while 0.7% of white, non-Hispanic workers did so. Eighteen percent of residents responding to the 2005/2006 Greater Grand Rapids Community Survey indicated that they had used public transportation in the past year. Again, racial/ethnic disparities exist in the overall use of public transit, as evidenced by data from the Community Survey (see graph below).

PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS WHO INDICATED USING PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS, BY RACE



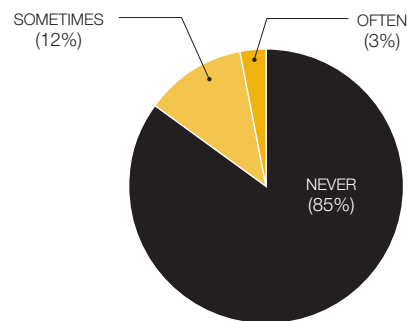
Transportation and the Economy

Michigan has been known as the home of the American auto industry for the past century. Much of the state's economy has stemmed from the automotive industry. It can be said that automobile ownership is so central to the classic American dream that many communities have been laid out under the assumption that all residents will own a car. Many residents, however, may see automobiles as unattainable or undesirable. For these residents, access to employment and necessary goods and services is often dependent upon public transit. The 2005/2006 Greater Grand Rapids Community Survey questioned Kent County residents on a number of topics, including transportation issues. Three of every twenty respondents indicated a lack of transportation being problematic in getting to work or other places (see *Indicator 1*). Transportation troubles can present economic issues: 2% of employed respondents who stated they were looking for better jobs cited transportation as the main factor keeping them from new employment; 3% of unemployed survey participants indicated transportation as the limiting factor.

Race, Ethnicity, and Transportation

Responses to the Community Survey show that transportation presents a problem to 15% of Kent County residents. These data also show a correlation between race/ethnicity and whether or not transportation is an issue (see *Indicator 2*). Thirty-three percent of Native American and 32% of African American respondents indicated that transportation is sometimes or often a problem. White respondents, by contrast, indicated that transportation was less problematic for them, with only 12% having difficulties in the past year. Data from the 2000 United States Census suggest an explanation for this, as Kent County homes with Native American and African American householders were least likely to have one or more vehicle available (82.1% and 80.9%, respectively), while housing units with white householders were most likely to have at least one vehicle (94.3%).

**INDICATOR 1:
HOW OFTEN IS LACK OF TRANSPORTATION A PROBLEM FOR YOU IN GETTING TO WORK OR OTHER PLACES YOU NEED TO GO?**

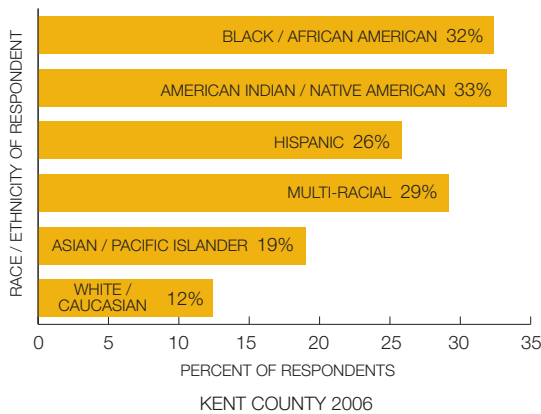


KENT COUNTY 2006

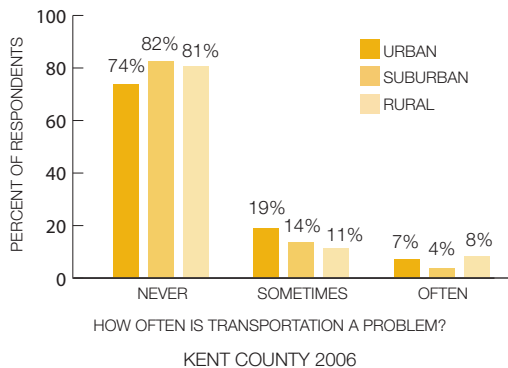
Geography and Transportation

Diverse geographies comprise Kent County: from urban Grand Rapids and its surrounding suburban areas to rural agricultural communities. Given this diversity, it may be expected that transportation needs also differ. Respondents to the Community Survey living in urban areas indicated a higher incidence of transportation-related problems (26% of the urban population reported problems) than participants living in suburban and rural regions of Kent County (18% and 19%, respectively). Rural respondents indicated a frequent transportation issue at a higher rate than urban and suburban residents (see *Indicator 3*); one possible reason for this may be insufficient public transit in those areas. The 2000 United States Census shows that 96% of rural Kent County households have at least one vehicle available (88% and 95% of urban and suburban households have access to a vehicle). While this is a large number, it must be assumed that, in addition to the 4% of homes without a vehicle, some households have only one vehicle to share among several drivers. The limited availability of alternative forms of transportation in rural areas may create an environment in which a lack of transportation is problematic.

INDICATOR 2:
PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS INDICATING TRANSPORTATION IS SOMETIMES OR OFTEN A PROBLEM FOR GETTING TO WORK OR OTHER NEEDED PLACES, BY RACE



INDICATOR 3:
RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION "HOW OFTEN IS LACK OF TRANSPORTATION A PROBLEM FOR YOU IN GETTING TO WORK OR OTHER PLACES YOU NEED TO GO?" BY GEOGRAPHY



Kent County's Million Dollar Commute

Travel time to work varies greatly from house to house and region to region. According to the 2000 United States Census, the average travel time to work for Kent County residents is 21 minutes—ranging from an average of 18 minutes in East Grand Rapids to 35 minutes in Spencer Township. This translates to 190,621 hours of commuting daily and suggests that huge amounts of fuel are used each day by Kent County residents.

Eighty-three percent (236,947) of Kent County workers travel alone to the jobsite by car, truck, or van. One can estimate that single-occupant commuters account for 158,900 hours of travel each day.

Fuel economy data from the United States Environmental Protection Agency (for 2005) can be used to estimate that these drivers consume 398,720 gallons of gasoline daily, if these commuters drive at an average speed of 55 miles per hour and use regular unleaded fuel.

The United States Department of Energy reports that the national average for unleaded fuel was \$2.30/gallon in 2005, meaning that the cost to fuel the daily commute of Kent County residents who drive alone is approximately \$917,000.



photo courtesy of Gozde Otman

The Greater Grand Rapids Community Survey, now in its sixth year, assesses citizen opinions, perceptions, and behaviors as they relate to quality of life in the Greater Grand Rapids Area (Kent County). More specifically, the community survey provides population, economic, community and public opinion data to present a picture of the Kent County community as a place to live. The 2006 Survey is a collaborative effort between the Community Research Institute of the Johnson Center at Grand Valley State University (CRI), Grand Rapids Community Foundation, Heart of West Michigan United Way, and the Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation.

This report is part of a series of briefing papers. It is available online at www.cridata.org/publications, along with the rest of the series and the 2005/2006 Greater Grand Rapids Community Survey report.



**Dorothy A. Johnson Center
for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership**

288C Richard DeVos Center
401 Fulton Street West
Grand Rapids, MI 49504-6431
tel: 616.331.7585
fax: 616.331.7592

www.johnsoncenter.org

Grand Valley State University is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Institution

© 2007 Johnson Center

Copyright – Fair Use Policy

All rights reserved. Materials may be used for educational purposes.
Materials are not to be used or sold for commercial purposes or profit.