

Transportation Survey Results Are In!
Green Sanctuary Survey
February 2009

In February, the Green Sanctuary Committee asked members of the congregation to answer a few questions about their travel to services and other events at the church. A total of 105 participated. Each answered for his or her household, so a substantial proportion of the members is represented in the data.

People travel as far as 35 miles from their homes to the church, while others live less than a mile away; the average is about 6 miles. There is also considerable variation in how often members make the trip, with 16 percent coming only once or twice a month and the same proportion doing so more than eight times every month; the average is more than five trips per month. Taking into account both distance and frequency, the respondents reported travelling an average of 64 miles per month getting to and from church.

Is 64 miles per month a big number or a small number? It's all relative, of course: big or small compared to what? But let's tie it to something we all should care about: the amount of carbon dioxide that could be released if all of those miles were by private cars, since carbon dioxide is a greenhouse gas that is a major contributor to climate change. The average car and light truck on the road today gets 20.3 miles per gallon. That means that it would take over 3 gallons a month for each respondent to get to and from church events, or almost 40 gallons a year, if all trips were made by car. Since each gallon burned results in the release of almost 20 pounds of carbon dioxide, that would result in the release of over 700 pounds of carbon dioxide per year. Multiply this by the 105 respondents, and we are up to almost 40 tons of carbon dioxide per year. And if we assume the respondents are one fourth of the total congregation, the total for the congregation would be over 150 tons per year. And that, we think you agree, would be a lot of hot air!

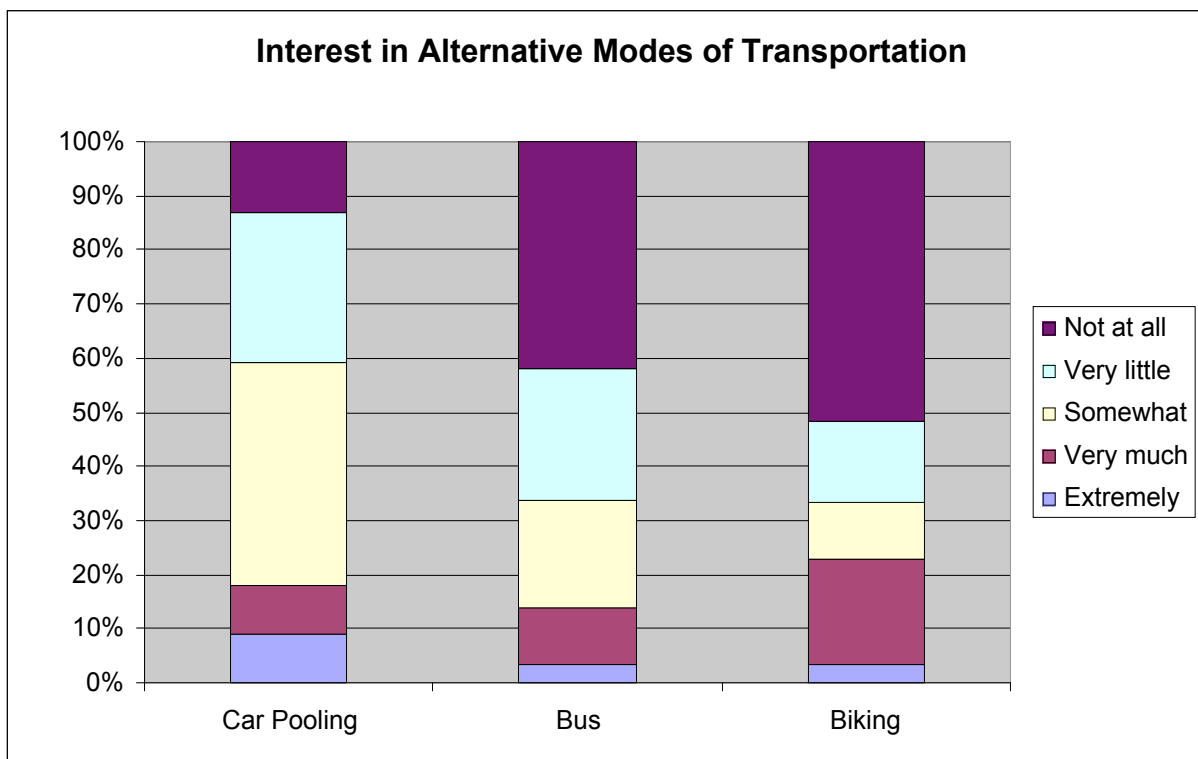
One objective of the Green Sanctuary Committee for collecting this information was to help us find ways to reduce the impact of transportation to church events on climate change. And while we certainly don't want to ask you to cut down on your trips to church and it wouldn't be practical to ask you to move closer to the church, there are several ways to reduce the impact of those trips, and the data we collected tell us that many of you are already doing some of those things. For example, some of the respondents confirmed what any of us can see from looking at the cars parked around the church on Sunday mornings: many of you drive cars that get mileage considerably higher than the national average, including many Priuses and other hybrids. Others of you combine your trips to church with errands. We can't quantify the impact of those two practices, but we can do so for other ways you are saving gas.

About 1 in 6 trips were NOT made in the respondents' own cars: 9% were by carpool with another driver; 5% were on foot; 1% were by bicycle, and 1% were by bus. Overall, one third of the respondents said that at least one of their trips to church in the past two months was by an alternative mode rather than in their own car. Moreover, about a quarter reported

that they usually had someone who was not a member of their household – that is, a car pooler – with them on their trips to church. Altogether, it seems that over half of the respondents either made at least some of their trips to church by a method other than their own car or provided a ride to a carpooler on trips they did drive. That’s wonderful! Congratulations to those of you who are already using ways to reduce the amount of carbon dioxide you release on your trips to church!

Now let’s look at what keeps you from using these alternative methods of transportation more often.

We asked respondents how interested they were in three of those alternative methods of transportation: carpooling, public transportation, and biking. Their answers are summarized in the chart below:



Well over half said that they were at least somewhat interested in carpooling, and a third were at least somewhat interested in riding a bus or biking to church. Those are much higher proportions than currently use these modes on a regular basis.

What keeps people in their own cars rather than adopting one of these more earth-friendly modes? There are many factors, of course. The most frequent obstacle to carpooling, cited by over half, is that it is “difficult to coordinate schedules and make arrangements with others.” One in four said that they “don’t know people who live near me.” We are pleased that help may be on the way in reducing these obstacles: UUCE is now set up on LTD’s free Commuter Solutions rideshare system, so that members can enter their data and be matched

with people who live near them. The more folks who sign up, the more that matches will be found. You can register online at www.ltd.org/cs/forms/carform.html, or Green Sanctuary has paper forms which you can complete and mail. Enter UUCE as “employer.” You can put down which service you normally attend. LTD sends an email letter to you, alerting you that there is a potential match. We hope that the goal expressed by one respondent is shared by many others: “I am actively recruiting carpoolers for choir practice and Sunday mornings – my goal is a full car!”

Other obstacles to carpooling include time (37% agreed with the statement that “I have a tight schedule, with little time to spare”); not attending UUCE on a regular or predictable schedule (26%); and already having a full car with members of their own family (11%). One suggestion: Perhaps you come to the church building for different purposes other than Sunday morning services, such as committee meetings or choir practice. Think about whether it makes sense to carpool to those activities, and talk about it with others who participate in them.

Time is the major reason people said they don’t ride the bus to church (cited by 48%). Related to this, 36% cited the infrequency of buses on routes that serve them, 22% said that the nearest bus stop is inconvenient, and others volunteered that they have no bus service where they live, or no service on Sundays. Several expressed the hope that the church would relocate to a central location which could be reached without having to take more than one bus.

Biking was not seen as a viable option by one fourth of the respondents because of their age or health, and a third pointed to the hillside location of the church as an obstacle. A third also said that weather concerns keep them from biking. One in four said that they do not bike because they are responsible for getting other family members to church.

So that is what you told us about how you get to church services and events. We are encouraged to know that so many of you already use alternative transportation modes at least occasionally. We also gained a better understanding of the obstacles many of you face that have kept you from using those modes more frequently. The Green Sanctuary Committee will be discussing these findings and seeking ways to reduce some of the major obstacles, and to encourage all of us to do more to reduce our impact on climate change. We hope that many of you will take advantage of the LTD program mentioned earlier that matches people in the same neighborhood who are interested in carpooling. In the coming months, look for other suggestions. And next February we plan to do a similar survey to look for ways in which things have changed. As always, we invite you to join us at our meetings, the second Mondays of the month at 7 PM.