
PUBLIC TRANSIT and PARKING ISSUES
Durango Downtown Market Assessment
Preliminary RRC Survey Research Findings ¹

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The Downtown Market Assessment research project funded by the BID, LEAD, and the City of Durango contains data that may be helpful in the current public transit and downtown parking discussions. The BID and LEAD asked RRC Associates to comment on this issue based on surveys conducted this past year among visitors and residents.

Phase I of the study includes two survey efforts: 1) a downtown “intercept” study of both residents and visitors; 2) a mail survey to residents of La Plata County. Both surveys asked questions on method of transportation in accessing the downtown as well as desire for transit and parking-related improvements. The methodology for both surveys is included as an attachment to this summary.

The data can lend insight into some of the existing behavioral patterns and perceptions of downtown, while hopefully helping to answer the broader questions:

- What is the purpose of public transit in the downtown?
- What are the fee structures?
- Who are the target markets and how do we reach them?
What are the goals?
- And, how do these policies intersect and/or impact other parties (BID, downtown merchants, residents, City, etc.)?

The following summary presents input from local residents and visitors on circulation and parking issues as they relate to the downtown experience.

Downtown Markets

- The tourist and resident markets are critically important to the economic vibrancy of downtown. Roughly 60 percent of patronage (volume) during the peak season months of May through October comes from locals (59 percent of downtown patrons are locals/41 percent are visitors to Durango). However, visitors spend on average three times more than locals per capita per day (not including lodging), therefore the contributions of both segments are vital to the sustainable economic growth of the downtown.

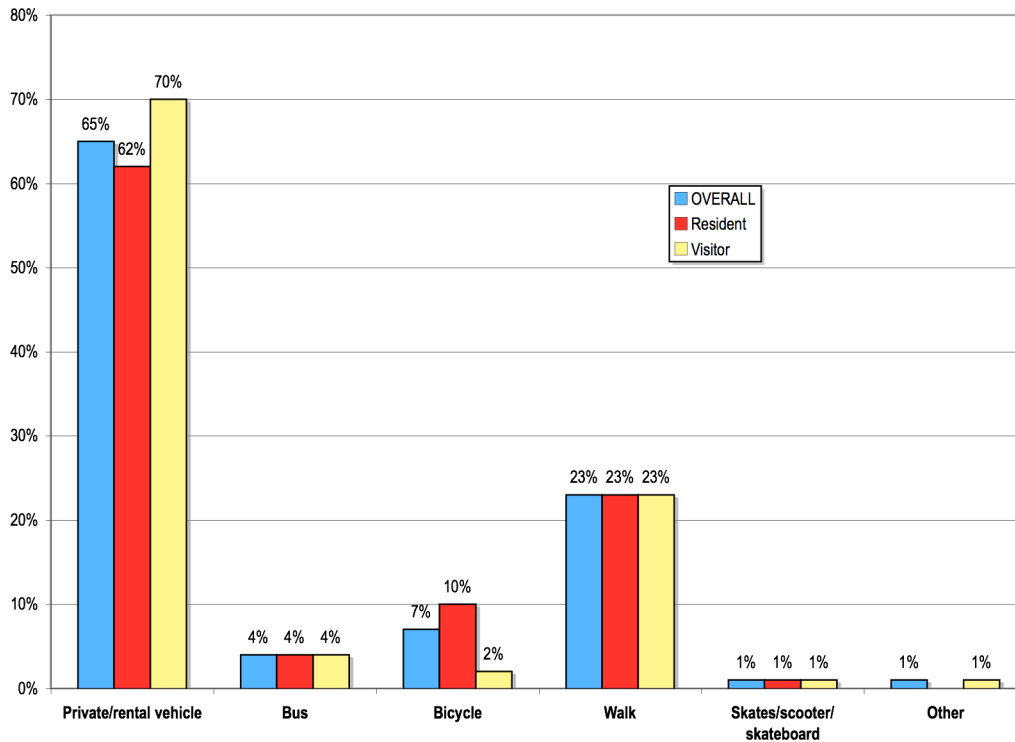
¹ RRC Associates will be completing Phase One of the Durango Market Assessment, funded by the City of Durango, the Durango BID and the La Plata Economic Development Action Partnership (LEAD) in early December 2008. This preliminary research report represents a snapshot of the comprehensive RRC research that will be presented on December 8, 2008.

Transportation Patterns

- Most segments – visitors and locals – drive to get downtown in the peak season (65 percent overall; 62 percent residents and 70 percent visitors). An additional 23 percent of both visitors and locals walked, and 4 percent rode the bus.

HOW DID YOU GET TO DOWNTOWN TODAY?
(DOWNTOWN INTERCEPT SURVEY)

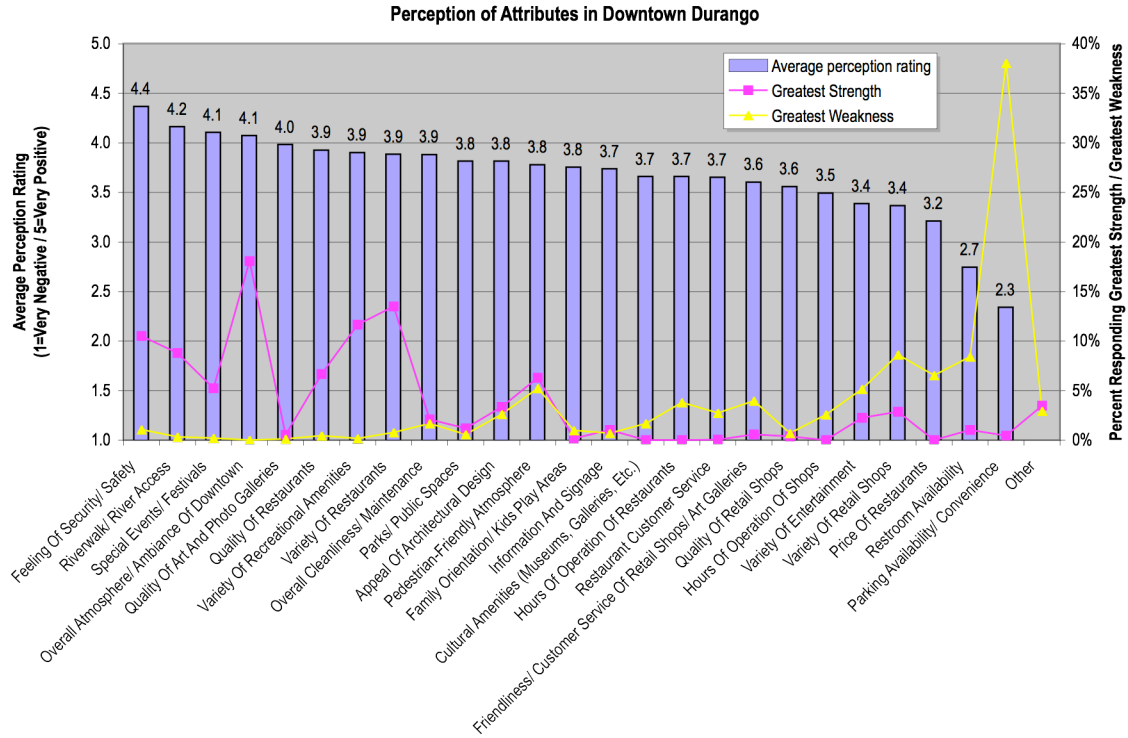
	OVERALL	Resident	Visitor
Private/rental vehicle	65%	62%	70%
Bus	4%	4%	4%
Bicycle	7%	10%	2%
Walk	23%	23%	23%
Skates/scooter/ skateboard	1%	1%	1%
Other	1%		1%



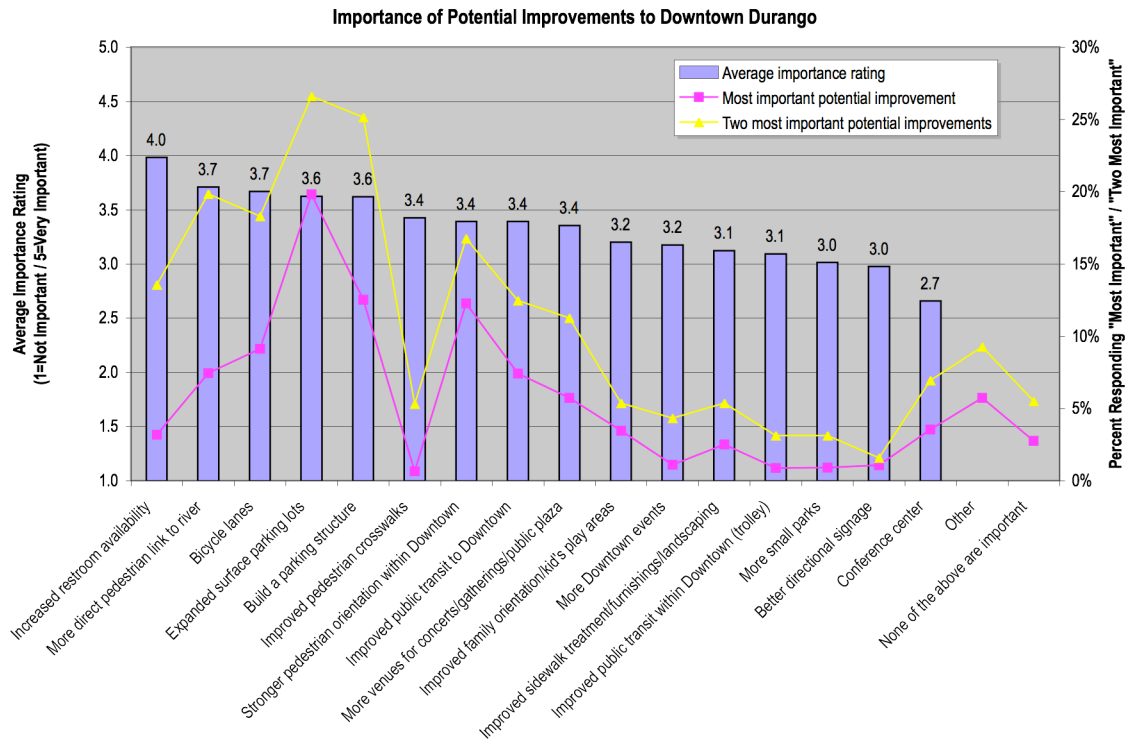
- Close to half of visitors to downtown are staying in lodging either in or adjacent to the downtown (42 percent of overnight visitors). Of these visitors, 40 percent walk to downtown, 50 percent drive, 5 percent ride the bus, and 2 percent ride their bicycles.

Desired Improvements to Downtown

- From the residents' perspective, issues related to parking are perceived more negatively than other aspects of downtown: parking availability and convenience dominate other attributes as the greatest weakness of the downtown.



- Consistent with the above perceptions, locals placed high importance on improving parking, restrooms, and enhancing the pedestrian orientation of the downtown (bicycle lanes, pedestrian connectivity to the river, crosswalks). Improving the transit situation (both within and to downtown) was of moderate to low importance when compared to other potential downtown improvements. Out of 17 potential improvements, improved public transit to downtown ranks 8th and improved public transit within the downtown ranks 13th.



Conclusions

- Maximizing parking resources and improving parking management by encouraging turnover of parking spaces for local shoppers and tourists are a few of the many goals of an effective downtown public transit system. It is not clear whether local shoppers will modify their behavior and convert to using public transit given their present patterns and moderate-to-low desire for improving the existing transit system. We feel that the greater opportunity lies in creating incentives and education of downtown employers/employees to use public transit to access downtown from home or outskirts of downtown. Perhaps the BID can work cooperatively with the City to identify barriers to increased usage of public transit among downtown employees, and, based upon feedback, develop infrastructure, incentive, and education programs for downtown employers and their employees.
- From the visitors' perspective, the potential for conversion from private vehicle to public transit for access to downtown is significant, especially for those 42 percent

of overnight visitors who are staying in proximity to downtown. Similar to residents, identifying the potential obstacles (e.g., convenience, awareness, safety) for visitors to ride the trolley is the first step, followed by cooperative efforts among the BID, City, hoteliers, and downtown businesses to minimize the hurdles and increase ridership of the trolley. Making the trolley an integral and positive aspect of the visitors' downtown experience would be win-win, by both enhancing the tourists' perception of downtown and the City as well as relieving some of the parking pressures in the peak season.

- The data does not speak directly to the impact of receiving parking tickets or recipients' sensitivity to the amount of the parking fines. It is obviously a delicate issue as the need to manage parking resources/turnover, revenues, and enforcement must be balanced with downtown patrons' perception of the convenience, cost, and hassle in coming downtown as compared to other shopping districts in and outside of Durango. The economic sustainability of the downtown depends primarily on sales tax revenues from both locals and tourists, and as competition from other shopping districts (with free parking) in Durango intensifies, it becomes even more important to monitor closely the reactions of these markets to any parking policy changes made by the City.

DOWNTOWN MARKET ASSESSMENT: SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Intercept Survey The methodology used for gathering data is “intercept” surveys, whereby interviewers randomly select respondents and administer a 10-minute survey. The random sampling methodology ensures that the results are “projectible” to the entire population – that is, the responses are representative of the population of downtown over the course of the time period. Efforts are made to distribute the sampling proportionally between weekend/weekdays and throughout the day in order to ensure capturing the lunch and dinner crowds, special events, holiday periods, and so on. **A total of 664 intercept surveys were conducted on Main Street and 2nd Avenue between March 18 and October 14, 2008 (79 percent on Main Street; 21 percent on 2nd Avenue).**

Mailback Survey The mailback survey was a longer survey (7 pages) mailed to randomly selected individuals from a list of households in Durango and surrounding areas in the County. The purpose of this survey was to assess the degree of “leakage” to other shopping areas in Durango as well as neighboring communities, the Internet, and so on. This survey was designed to provide a more complete picture of the downtown in the broader community and regional context, as both patrons and non-patrons of downtown comprised the sample population. Because this survey is targeted to residents only, questions relating to land use and capital improvements were included as part of the survey. In addition to the sales leakage analysis, trends and perceptions of downtown comparing patrons to non-patrons, barriers to increased visitation to downtown, possible incentives/amenities for increasing patronage were analyzed.

To ensure that the results are representative of the resident population, a comparison of the respondent profile to the 1990 U.S. Census and state projections was conducted and the data weighted to reflect the demographic profile of the population. **A total of 2,500 mailback surveys were mailed out in October and approximately 400 surveys were completed and returned.**