

Fall 2024 Commute Survey Results Summary Report

Jan. 10, 2025

The Office of Transportation and Mobility

The Office of Data and Strategic Analytics

Introduction

The Office of Transportation and Mobility, in partnership with the Office of Data and Strategic Analytics, conducted a survey in October 2024 to assess the commute and transportation practices of the Vanderbilt University community. Similar surveys in 2019, 2022 and 2023 guided programs related to [MoveVU](#), Vanderbilt's strategic transportation and mobility plan that falls under the [FutureVU](#) comprehensive campus planning effort.

We use this annual survey to increase our understanding of the Vanderbilt community's commuting patterns and to track the results of MoveVU efforts and how transportation and commute patterns change over time.

The implementation of MoveVU is a collaborative partnership of Vanderbilt's School of Engineering, the Division of Administration, the Facilities Department and the Office of Transportation and Mobility. The vision of MoveVU calls for a transformation in how the Vanderbilt community commutes to campus, with less reliance on single-occupancy vehicles and parking lots and a greater focus on sustainable commute modes and green spaces.

Survey Methodology

The Fall 2024 Commute Survey had a 32 percent response rate.

We sent the 2024 commute survey to all faculty, staff, graduate/professional students and postdoctoral scholars, a total of 13,823 people. The Office of Transportation and Mobility and the Office of Data and Strategic Analytics received 4,469 responses (partial completes included), a 32 percent response rate. Staff had the highest response rate, at 42 percent, while professional students had the lowest response rate at 21 percent.

This response rate is in range with recent past DSA survey efforts, although the 2023 commute survey had a 42 percent response rate.

Demographics of participants and limitations of the sample

While the sample closely mirrored the population demographics, certain groups were disproportionately represented. White (66%), female (64%) and employees earning \$60K-100K (43%) were overrepresented relative to their population proportions (57%, 58% and 34%, respectively). Black (7%), male (36%) and employees earning less than \$60K (22%) were underrepresented relative to their population (12%, 42% and 34%, respectively).

Seventeen out of the 33 business units had 50 percent or higher participation rate. Participation was 60 percent or higher for nine business units, while other units showed lower participation rates—15%–25%. In addition, the 2024 survey was intentionally timed to be open at the same two-week period as open enrollment, and staff from the Office of Transportation and Mobility participated in open enrollment events to encourage survey responses.

Key Findings

51 percent of respondents reported being “hybrid.”

Overall, 44 percent of respondents reported they worked entirely on campus, and 51 percent selected “hybrid” as their work status.

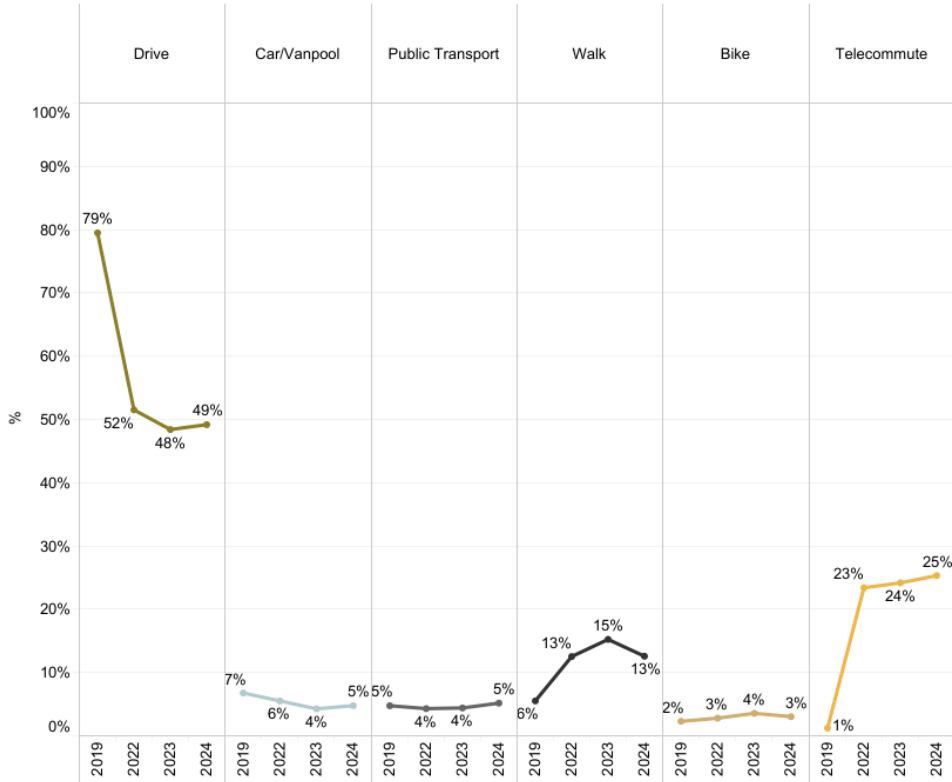
Work arrangements remain similar to 2023 by university role

The type of work status reported depended on one’s role at the university. Consistent with 2023 findings, the 2024 survey shows that staff (32%) are less likely to work entirely on campus compared with other roles. Postdocs (68%), graduate students (64%) and professional students (54%) are more likely to report being entirely on-campus than faculty (46%) and staff (32%). Staff are more likely to report a hybrid (61%) or entirely remote (8%) work arrangement relative to faculty and graduate students.

13 percent of respondents say walking is their primary mode of transportation to campus.

Compared with 2019, the percent of commuters driving alone to work decreased to 49 percent from 79 percent. The percent of commuters reporting walking as their primary mode of transportation increased to 13 percent from 6 percent. **These sustained shifts in mode share are an indication that commute behavior has permanently changed since the COVID-19 pandemic.**

Primary Commute Mode 2019–2024



The Office of Transportation and Mobility will continue to administer programs that support and sustain this increase in walking, while working to identify strategies to spur similar increases in the other sustainable transportation modes. While the sustained increase in walking and telecommuting represents significant progress toward MoveVU goals, more will need to be done to increase levels of public transit, car/vanpool and biking use.

While 5 percent of faculty, staff and graduate/professional students report using public transport as their primary mode to commute to campus, during a typical month during the academic year, more than 1,500 members of the Vanderbilt community take more than 15,000 rides on WeGo using their public transit benefit. Through November, Vanderbilt university faculty, staff and students took more than 160,000 rides on WeGo in 2024.

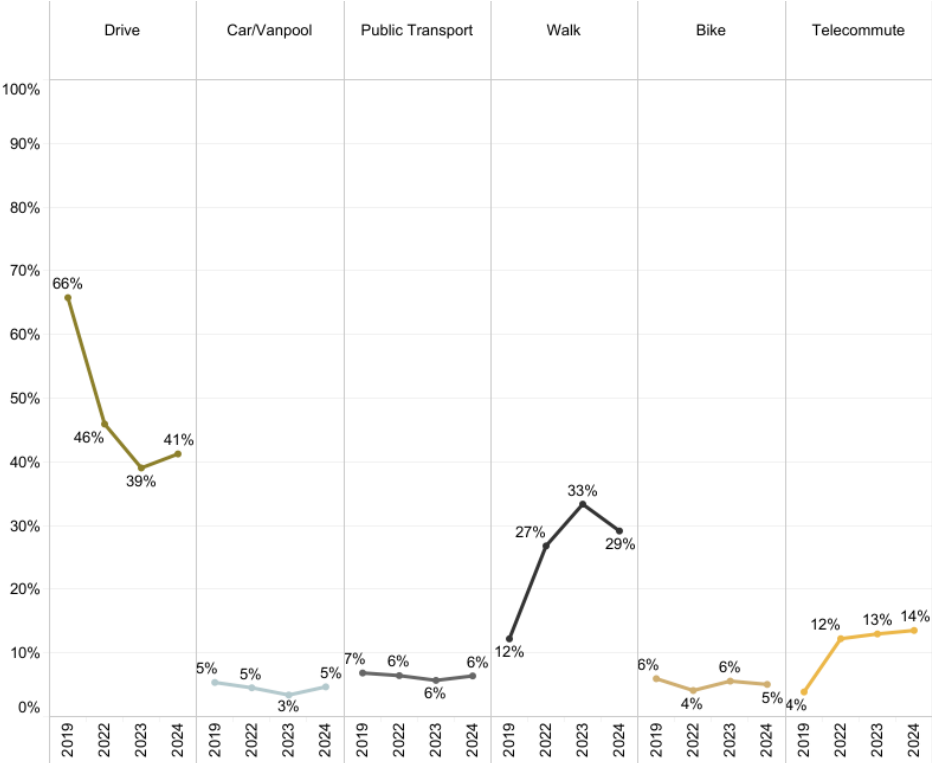
[Visit the interactive Tableau site to see the commute survey results from 2019, 2022, 2023 and 2024.](#)

Employees' work arrangements are determined by their department. If employees have any questions, they should speak with their school, college or division leadership.

Graduate/Professional students and postdocs showed the largest shift to walking among university roles.

For graduate/professional students and postdocs, the mode share for **walking** increased from 12 percent in 2019 to 29 percent in 2024, while **driving alone** decreased from 66 percent in 2019 to 41 percent in 2024. Overall mode share for biking, walking and public transit appears relatively consistent in the four surveys.

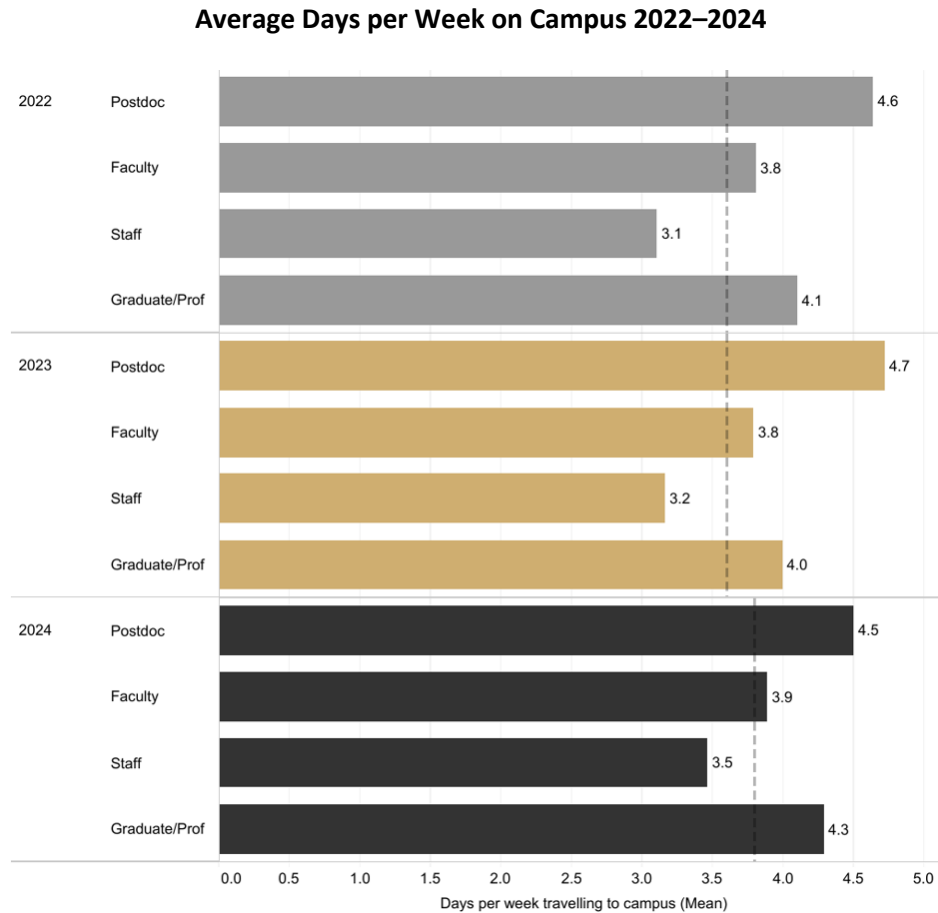
Graduate and Professional Students’ Primary Commute Mode 2019–2024



Note: For visual clarity, data labels are rounded. Lines are drawn based on precise, unrounded values.

Consistent with 2022 and 2023, staff have the longest commutes but are on campus (on average) fewer days per week.

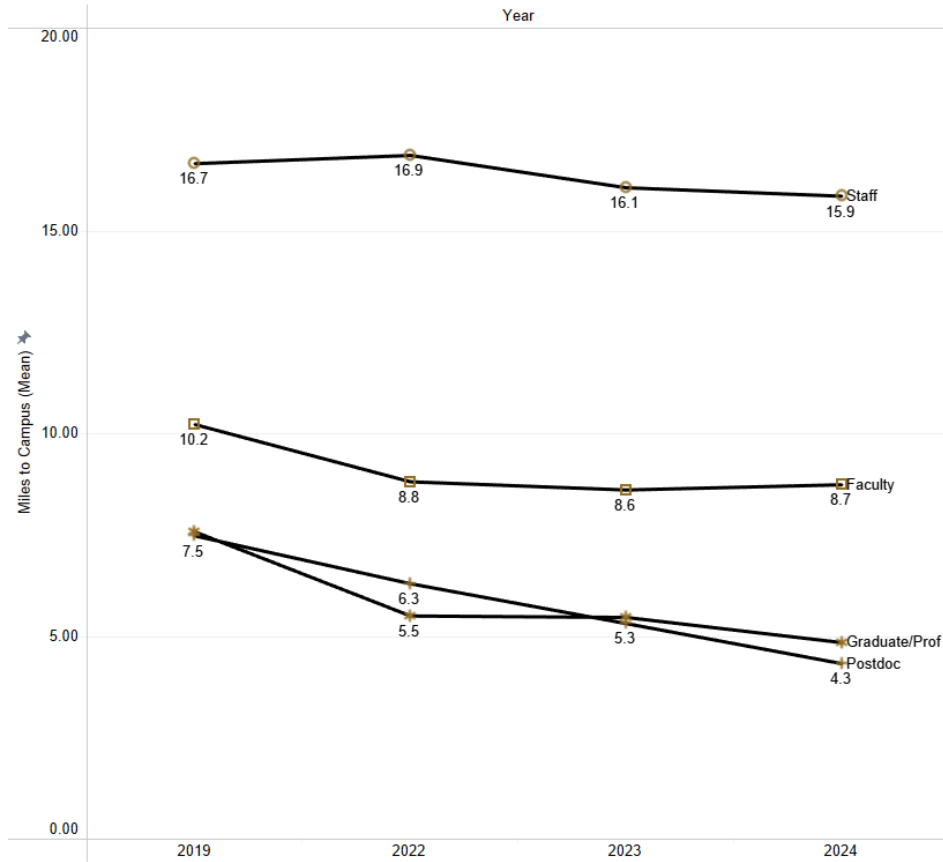
On average, people travel to campus 3.8 days/week. On average, postdocs graduate/professional students and faculty travel to campus more than staff.



Staff, on average, commute longer distances than the other university roles (average 15.9 miles one-way). Professional (5.1 miles) and graduate students (4.6 miles) have shorter commutes relative to faculty and staff.¹

¹ For 2024 the median commute distances (in miles) were: staff (13), faculty (6), postdoc (2.5), graduate students (2), and professional students (1.8).

Miles Traveled to Campus (Mean) 2019–2024

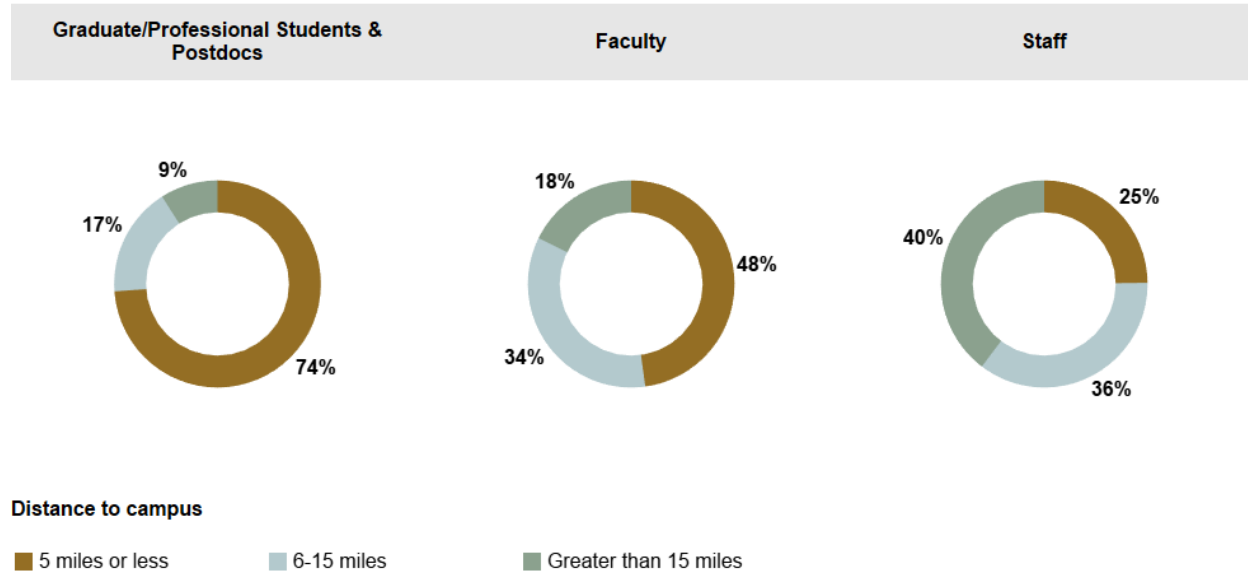


The 2022–2024 samples reported slightly shorter commutes than the 2019 sample in terms of miles traveled. Across all survey years, graduate/professional students and postdocs are living closest to campus. Given this sustained difference in commute distance by university role, the Office of Transportation and Mobility is continuing to explore programs and communications efforts to meet the needs of graduate/professional students and postdocs who report shorter commutes and therefore have more transportation options available to them.

46 percent of respondents reported commuting less than five miles (one way).

62 percent of respondents commute less than 10 miles. There are significant differences in the proportion of population that lives within 5 miles when considering university role. 25 percent of staff commute less than 5 miles, while 48 percent of faculty commute less than five miles and 74 percent of graduate, professional students and postdocs commute less than five miles.

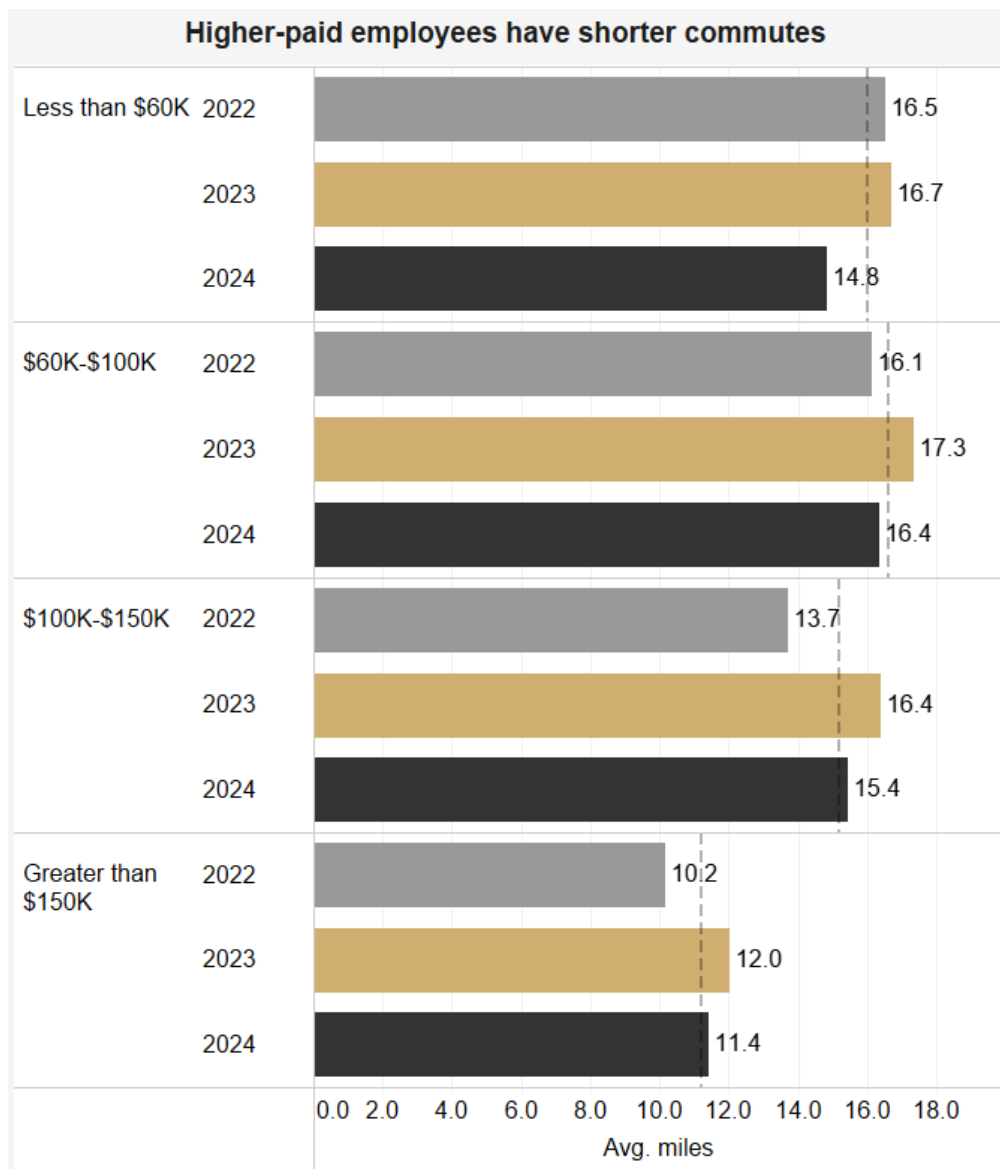
Overall, 46% commute 5 miles or less to campus (one-way)



Higher-paid employees have shorter commutes.

Similar to findings in 2022 and 2023, faculty and staff in the highest pay band reported shorter commutes than those in the lower three pay bands.² The pay band groups of less than \$60K and \$60K-\$100K reported longer commutes than the \$100K-\$150K pay band in 2022-23. In 2024, only the \$60K-\$100K pay band reported longer commutes than the \$100-\$150K pay band. The \$60K pay band did not differ from the \$100-\$150K group.

² In 2024, the highest pay band reported a shorter commute (Median = 7 miles) than employees in the other three pay bands: less than \$60K (Median = 10 miles), \$60-\$100K (Median = 13 miles), and \$100K-\$150K (Median = 11 miles) pay bands. All p-values of these pairwise comparisons were significant ($p < .001$). The median distance for the \$100K-\$150K group was shorter than the \$60K-\$100K group ($p = .01$) but not the less than \$60K pay band ($p = .53$). In previous years, this difference was significant (2023, $p = .03$ and 2022, $p < .001$).



Recommendation to market transportation options to the 62 percent who live within 10 miles.

While the Office of Transportation and Mobility understands that sustainable commute options are not an option for everyone, 46 percent of respondents reported commuting less than 5 miles (one way) to campus, and 62 percent reported a commute of less than 10 miles (one way). **Those with fewer miles to travel have more opportunities for shorter and more direct options: walking, biking and WeGo Public Transit trips.**

While staff commute longer distances than other university roles, graduate and professional students represent the largest portion of community members with the shortest commutes. When excluding fully remote learning programs from the analysis, 74 percent of graduate and professional student and postdocs commute less than 5 miles. In particular **the 74 percent of graduate, professional students**

and postdocs who commute less than 5 miles presents a significant opportunity to shift more trips from driving alone to sustainable transportation modes.

The Office of Transportation and Mobility will continue to target programs, as well as marketing and communications efforts, to those commuting fewer than 10 miles (one way) to encourage use of sustainable modes, including using the [WeGo benefit](#), the bike share system and walking.

MoveVU, Vanderbilt's Transportation Demand Management Program

Recognizing its prominent role as an innovation engine and one of the largest employers in Middle Tennessee, Vanderbilt is committed to rethinking its approach to transportation.

MoveVU, built on the foundation laid by [FutureVU](#), is that approach.

In pursuit of the FutureVU goals, the Division of Administration created the Office of Transportation and Mobility in 2018 to implement a comprehensive Transportation Demand Management program, detailed in [MoveVU](#), Vanderbilt's strategic transportation and mobility plan. MoveVU elaborates upon the transportation-focused components of the broader FutureVU goals. MoveVU goals align with Vanderbilt's overarching sustainability strategy to beautify the campus, expand green spaces, create a walkable and sustainable campus and reduce carbon emissions from vehicles.

The Office of Transportation and Mobility leads three core programs related to parking and commute behaviors:

- **MoveVU Commute Hub** – Launched in February 2020, the Commute Hub provides a website and mobile app that helps commuters track their trips. It also has a carpool matching feature that allows people to connect to other carpoolers and vanpoolers and displays real-time parking availability for the four daily parking garages.
- **Daily Parking Program** – Launched in September 2020, the daily parking program boasts more than 3,900 community members participating with access to 1,250 parking spaces. Participants in the daily parking program only pay for days that they park on campus, increasing the financial motivation associated with considering other modes on any given day. Users can see their parking deductions and receive statements that summarize their trips and parking charges in the MoveVU Commute Hub. Daily parking also utilizes campus parking spaces more efficiently, allowing for land use changes and facilities re-development that support Vanderbilt's academic and research missions.
- **Commute Incentives** – Incentive payments for sustainable commutes launched in September 2021. Commuters who take a sustainable commute such as walking, biking or riding the bus receive a \$1 incentive per weekday, up to \$20 per month. These incentives are applied to faculty and staff's paychecks and graduate/professional students' and postdocs' Commodore Cards.

Vanderbilt's comprehensive Transportation Demand Management program also provides commuter benefits, including free transit passes that allow all students, faculty and staff to ride WeGo Public Transit Buses, Train and Access services free of charge, a guaranteed ride home program and access to commute planning assistance from a Commute Concierge. Demonstrating the success of these programs, commuting emissions decreased 85 percent in between FY19–20 and FY22–23. This decrease

reflects the Vanderbilt community's shifts in commuting, hybrid/remote work patterns and increased data insights through the commute survey.

In addition to encouraging use of sustainable transportation modes through these TDM strategies, Vanderbilt is committed to making infrastructure improvements that facilitate the use of sustainable transportation options for commute trips and for greater on-campus mobility. Vanderbilt is planning and has partially constructed a [Walk & Roll Loop](#) around the campus edge, providing a comfortable walking/biking transition to the broader Nashville transportation network. These improvements also include upgrading and maintaining [bike parking, bike repair stations, and shower facilities on campus](#).

Vanderbilt embraces Metro Nashville's transformative transportation program with key campus benefits

On Nov. 5, 2024, voters in Davidson County approved the \$3.1 billion the ["Choose How You Move"](#) transportation referendum, with 66 percent of ballots cast in favor of the city's major overhaul of its transportation systems. Approval of the referendum triggers a half-cent increase in sales tax, which is set to take effect Feb. 1, 2025.

The approval of "Choose How You Move" means a better-connected Nashville. For Vanderbilt University, it means a campus seamlessly linked to the city through frequent, reliable public transit, safer sidewalks and smarter traffic signals.

How Nashville's transit overhaul will affect Vanderbilt

The unlimited transit benefit Vanderbilt currently offers will be more useful to more people with the upcoming transit enhancements. Nashville will offer 24/7/365 transit service, making public transit more frequent and convenient to campus and to different areas of the city. Vanderbilt community members will benefit from enhancements to transit corridors along West End Avenue and 21st Avenue, making it easier for students, faculty and staff to navigate the city without relying on personal vehicles. A new transit center near Vanderbilt's campus will improve regional connectivity and will be a hub to provide more frequent service to other parts of the county. Pedestrian enhancements along major transit corridors will make getting to and from the bus much safer and more convenient.

Parking Policy

Campus parking—because of its inefficient use of space and high property value—was identified as an underutilized asset while implementing FutureVU and MoveVU strategies. While the VU parking lots and garages have transformed as the VU campus has transformed, there is still enough parking for everyone on campus.

Understandably, with the major capital construction projects in recent years, along with MoveVU's efforts to rightsize the parking inventory, for some members of the Vanderbilt community, parking is no longer close to their office or academic building. Some parking requires a longer walk, a need to factor in more time into one's commute and additional distance for those with mobility needs. In 2019, Parking Services began offering the Mobility Rides service to assist those with mobility needs to get from their parking space or on-campus residence to where they need to go. Since its initial launch, the number of

requests for Mobility Rides has grown significantly. There were 2,474 Mobility Rides requested in 2023 and, 3,841 rides requested in 2024.

Conclusions and Next Steps

The Transportation and Mobility Office will use the data from, and feedback received through the commute survey to shape programs and refine the marketing of commuter benefits. This information will shape mobility and transportation programming and determine the most effective programs to support the community.

As the campus continues to transform based on FutureVU and MoveVU plans, there is a strong need to understand mobility challenges and the role that programs and transit services can fulfill. Identifying these challenges and considering how they impact the realization of Vanderbilt's community values will be vital to ensuring that campus infrastructure and mobility programs work for all people.