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November 2, 2020

Cleveland State University's Levin College has just completed the first wave of interviews on implementing the automated no-touch EZFare transit payment system at public transit authorities in Ohio. The project is funded by a 3-year Federal Transportation Administration IMI grant.

The research looks at determining the effect of EZFare on the quality of life of transit riders, including but not limited to determining the number of trips to work, medical, shopping, worship, etc. We also inquire about travel modes, COVID-19, and about overall life satisfaction. We also consider and the effectiveness of contactless EZFare smart cards to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and to minimize customer interaction. We are especially interested in under-banked and low-income transit users.

The project is led by Professor Robert (Roby) Simons and a team of CSU students and colleagues, being supported by steering committee comprised of NEORide transit partners in developing and vetting surveys, and in accessing transit customers. 11 Ohio-based transit agencies are participating and SARTA is the first agency to be surveyed. Once it is fully underway, the data set should include over 1,500 participants, re-surveyed (panel-study) every six months, over two years.

SARTA results

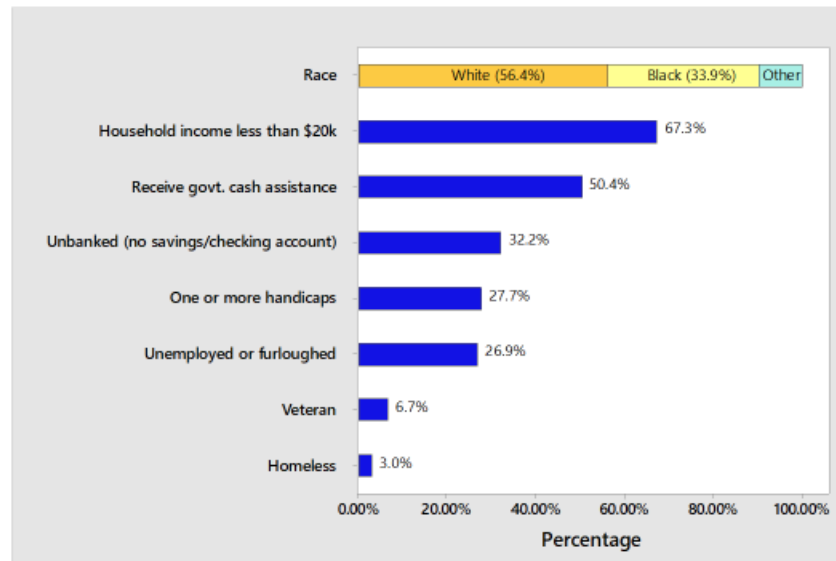
SARTA serves Canton and Stark County, Ohio. A total of 235 people successfully finished the survey during October 2020, which took an average of 15 minutes to complete online. 41% paid with cash and 34% used an EZFare app. 67% of respondents have access to the internet, and 98% had access to a cell/smart phone. This initial baseline survey was administered before EZFare touchless fare validators were installed on SARTA buses, implemented, but the survey does include pre-and-post COVID -19 questions.

Who took the survey

The survey focuses on low income riders, of which 32% are unbanked. 28% have a disability, and 27% are unemployed. 7% are veterans and 3% are homeless.



Respondent Demographics



EZFare: early impressions

Before EZFare validators are installed, 87% and 90% of respondents believe that purchasing a fare is faster and easier, respectively and 74% said boarding takes less time.

COVID-19: ridership patterns down 20-25% across the board

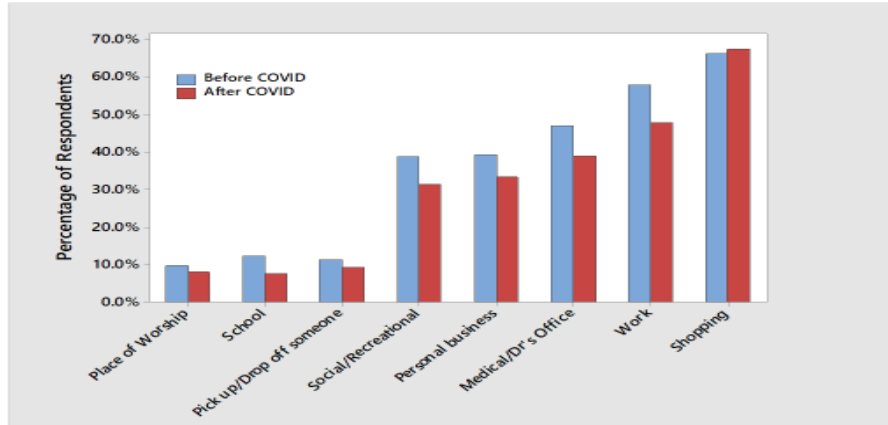
Respondents made 15 one-way trips per week across all travel modes before COVID compared to 12 trips after the pandemic started.

42% of respondents reported making NO one-way trips to work during a typical week before COVID to 52% after the onset of the pandemic.

45% of respondents reported riding SARTA every day during a typical week before COVID compared to 37% after the onset of the pandemic.

All destinations except shopping decreased after the onset of COVID.

Where did respondents travel to during the week before and after COVID (all transportation modes)?



About 37% of transit riders are moderately or extremely concerned about catching COVID about equally by touching surfaces or through breathing it in: 27% are not concerned at all about catching COVID.

Quality of Life: Slight decrease under COVID

81% of survey takers said they felt general satisfaction with their life before COVID, and this dropped slightly to 80% in October 2020, a decrease of 1%

77% of survey takers said they felt connected to their community before COVID, and this dropped to 75% in October 2020, a decrease of 2%

The next SARTA survey is planned for April 2021.

Questions? Dr. Simons can be reached at r.simons@csuohio.edu.

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