

Which riders are transit agencies reaching?

(It's not always who you might think.)

Comparing communications channels
by race and income

JANUARY 2022

Public transit service is a lifeline for millions of people to reach employment, education, healthcare, childcare, and more.

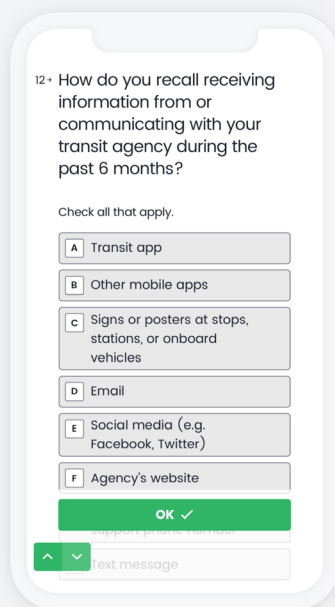
Communications from their transit agency – about service changes and fare payment, cancellations and mask mandates – can make or break their day, their job, or their ability to keep commitments to family and friends.

Without data-driven communications strategies, agencies may miss the riders they are trying to reach, and risk overrepresentation of White and high-income people in their outreach.

By looking at a subset of results from our quarterly Rider Happiness Benchmarking survey, *Transit* can offer a closer look at the reach of communications channels, sorted by income and race.

We found that when it comes to equity, public meetings and social media aren't going the distance, while apps, signage, and customer support phone lines are effective at reaching low-income riders and riders of colour.

This brief uses data in the United States from *Transit's* Autumn 2021 Ridership Happiness Benchmarking survey, which asked more than 21,000 transit riders across the country about their public transit experience. The survey also ran in Canada, and was available in English, Spanish, and French from October 20 to November 1, 2021.



We asked riders using our app: “How do you recall receiving information from or communicating with your transit agency during the past 6 months? Check all that apply.”

Notes about our analysis:

- We define high-income riders as those with household incomes above \$100,000 a year and low-income riders as those with household incomes below \$30,000 a year.
- Our survey allows riders to select multiple options for race and ethnicity, so the categories are not mutually exclusive.
- This survey is voluntary and represents only those who chose to take the survey in the app.

For more on *Transit's* user demographics, turn to page 8.

When it comes to equity...

Public meetings and social media aren't going the distance

TAKEAWAY	STATS
<p>Social media Social media may be easy and provide instant feedback, but its demographic makeup shows it isn't effective at reaching low-income and Black or Latino riders.</p>	<p>→ In our survey, social media is 3.5x more popular with high-income riders than low-income riders, with just 7.4% of low-income riders saying they used it for transit information. It's also 2.3x more popular with White respondents than Latino respondents.</p>
<p>Twitter is the worst offender. In the August 2021 edition of our survey, we asked riders to identify specific social media platforms they used to communicate with their transit agency.</p>	<p>→ High-income riders were 7.8x more likely to use Twitter for transit information than low-income riders and 2.1x more likely to use Instagram, whereas Facebook had a near-even split.</p>
<p>Public meetings Public meetings are often an important component of the decision-making process. However, not only were they the least popular selection across all groups, our data shows significant racial inequity in the reach of public meetings.</p>	<p>→ Riders, especially low-income, Black and Hispanic riders, are significantly underrepresented. For example, White riders were 4.4x more likely than Latino riders to say they had attended public meetings.</p>

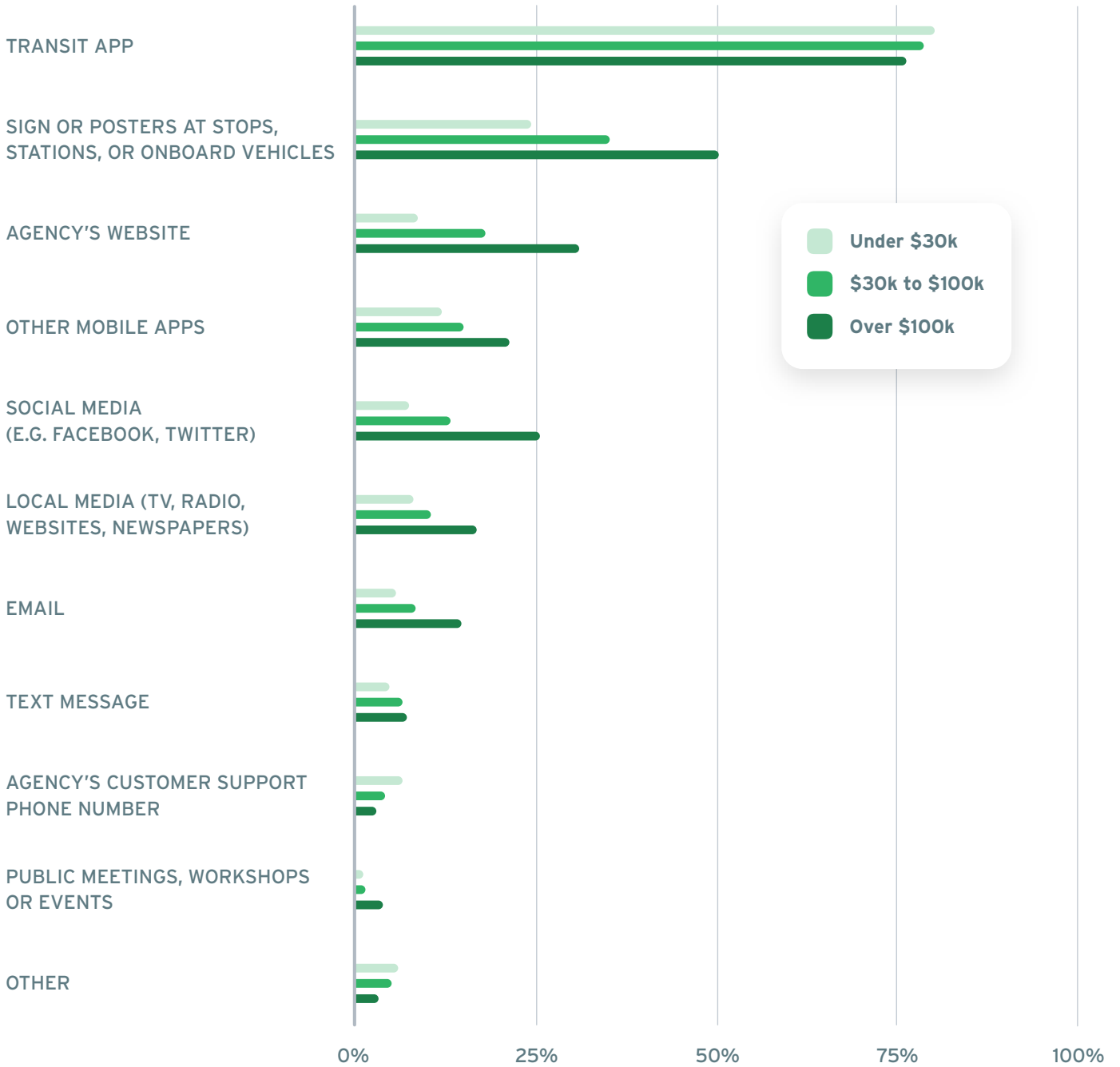
When it comes to equity...

Apps, signage, and customer support phone lines go a long way

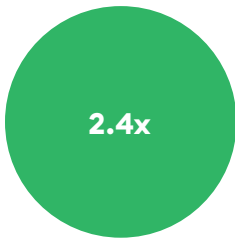
TAKEAWAY	STATS
<p>Mobile apps</p> <p>Over the past decade, mobile apps have become ubiquitous, increasing access to information for users in all demographic groups – and transit riders are no exception.</p> <p>Of course, this survey was distributed through <i>Transit</i>, so it’s no surprise that the vast majority of respondents recalled getting information from their agency through our app. Even so, it’s notable that no other distribution channel reached more than 1 in 3 riders in our survey.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Low-income riders were more than 10x more likely to receive agency communications through an app (whether <i>Transit</i> or another app) than through public meetings and social media combined. Compare that with high-income riders, who are just 3x more likely to get info through an app.
<p>Signs or posters</p> <p>Signs or posters at stops, stations, or onboard vehicles act as a transit agency’s physical presence and are an asset for equitable communication.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Physical marketing was the second most-selected channel for all riders, including low-income riders and riders of colour.→ It is worth noting that high-income riders cited using signage twice as frequently as low-income riders.
<p>Phone lines and text messages</p> <p>Despite the increasing ubiquity of smartphones, customer support phone lines and text messages remain an important mobile touchpoint, particularly for low-income, Black and Hispanic riders.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ These channels were selected by low-income riders about as often as other non-app options such as social media, email, and local media.→ In comparison, phone lines and text messages were two of the three least popular options for high-income riders.

Income

🇺🇸 Communication with transit agency by household income



More likely to reach low-income riders compared to high-income riders

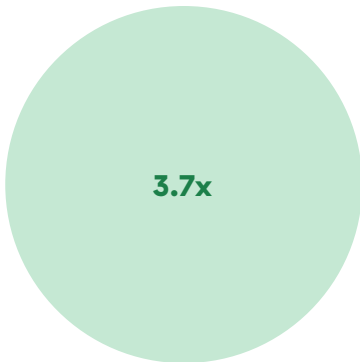


CUSTOMER SUPPORT
PHONE LINE

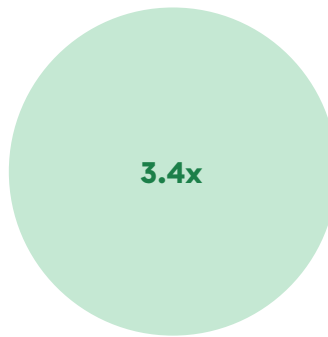


TRANSIT APP

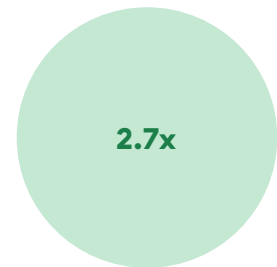
More likely to reach high-income riders compared to low-income riders



PUBLIC MEETINGS



SOCIAL MEDIA



EMAIL



LOCAL MEDIA



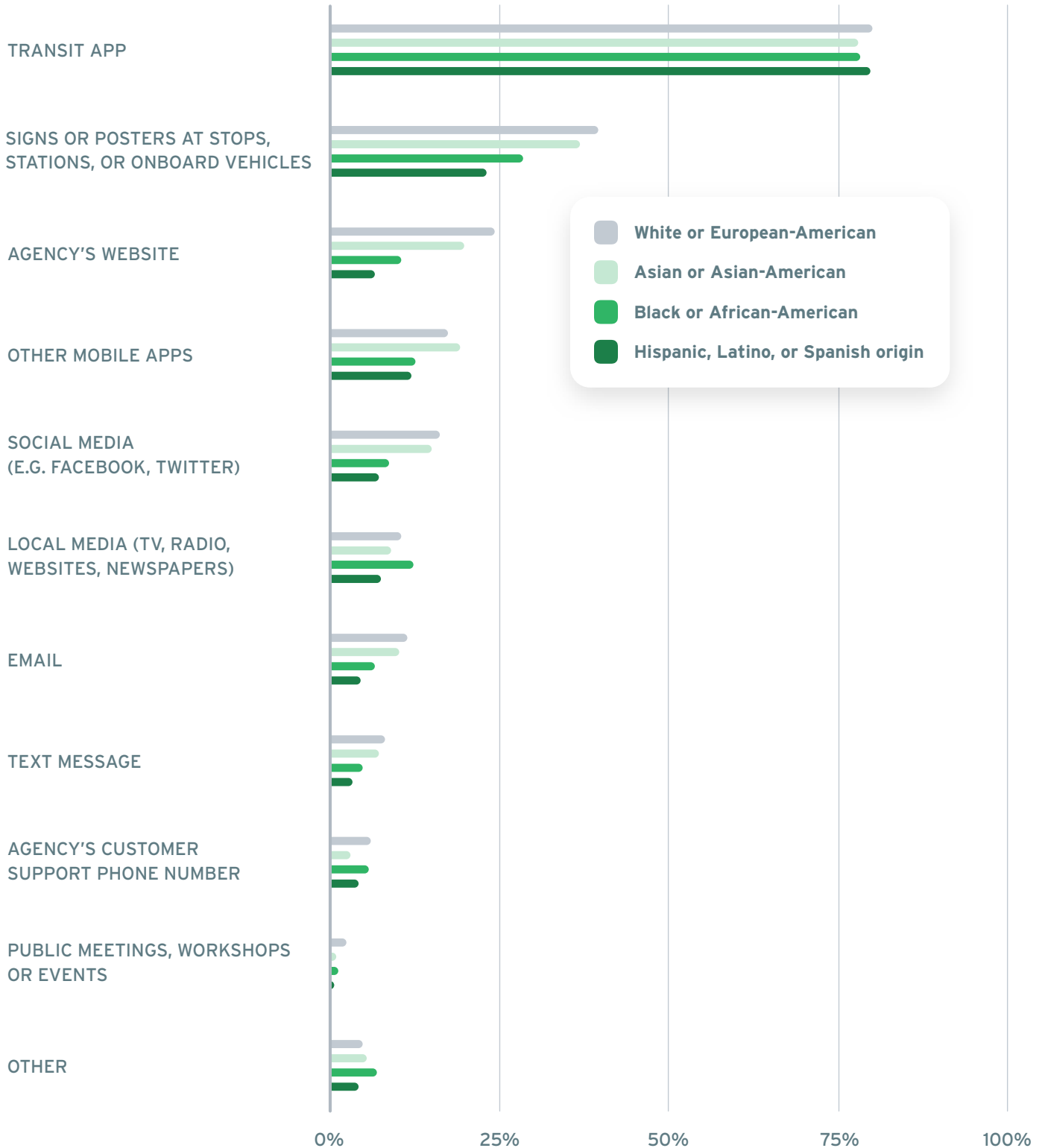
SIGNAGE



OTHER APPS

Race and ethnicity

🇺🇸 Communication with transit agency by race/ethnicity

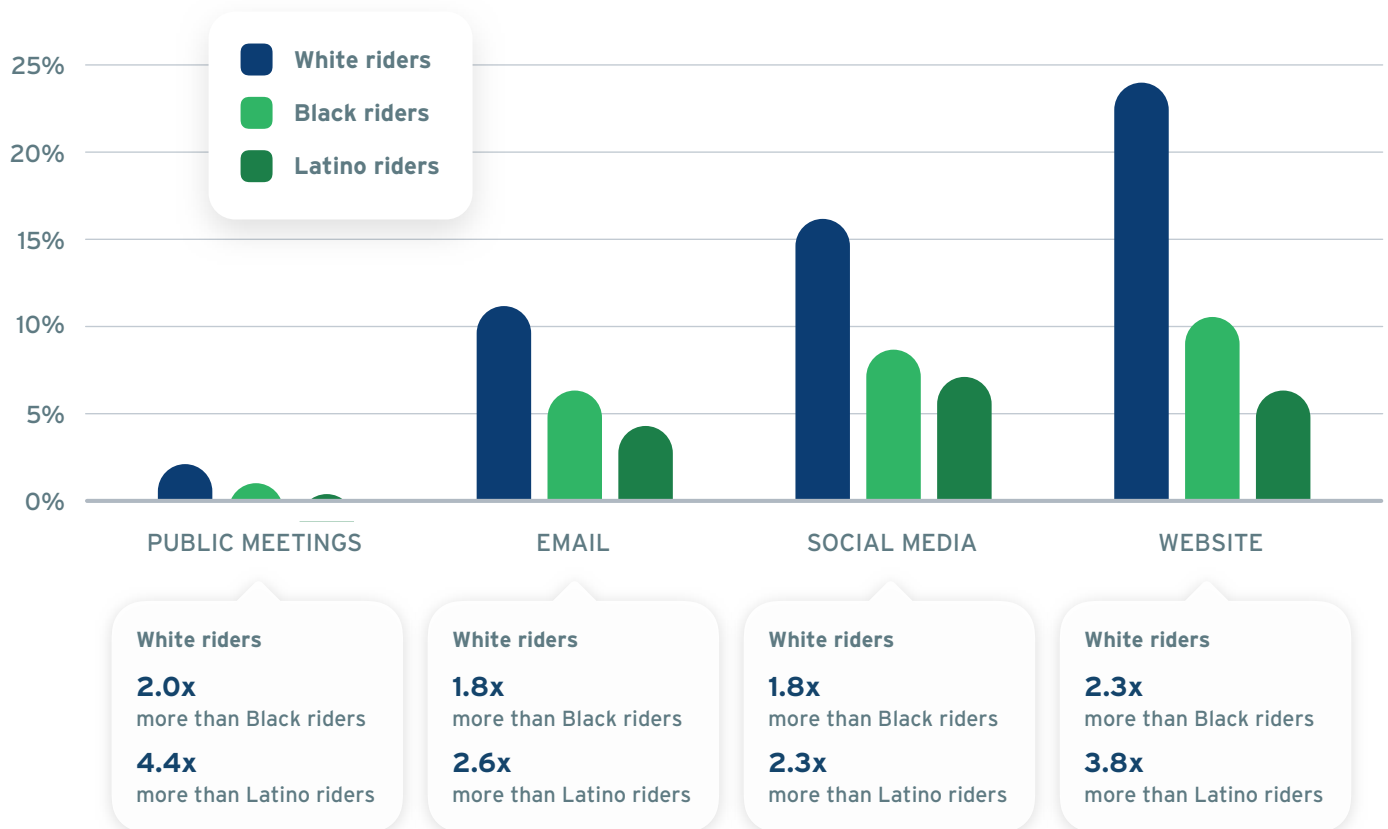


Keeping Black and Latino riders in the loop

White and Asian respondents are more likely to report using a wide variety of channels to get information from and communicate with their transit agency, while Black and Latino respondents report using the fewest number of channels. Latino respondents are almost always the least likely to use any given communication channel to communicate with or receive information from their transit agency.

Use of **mobile apps** and the **agency's customer support phone number** are more evenly distributed by race. Notably, **local media** (TV, radio, websites, newspapers) is the only category more likely to reach Black respondents than White, Asian, and Latino respondents.

Communications channels with disparate reach



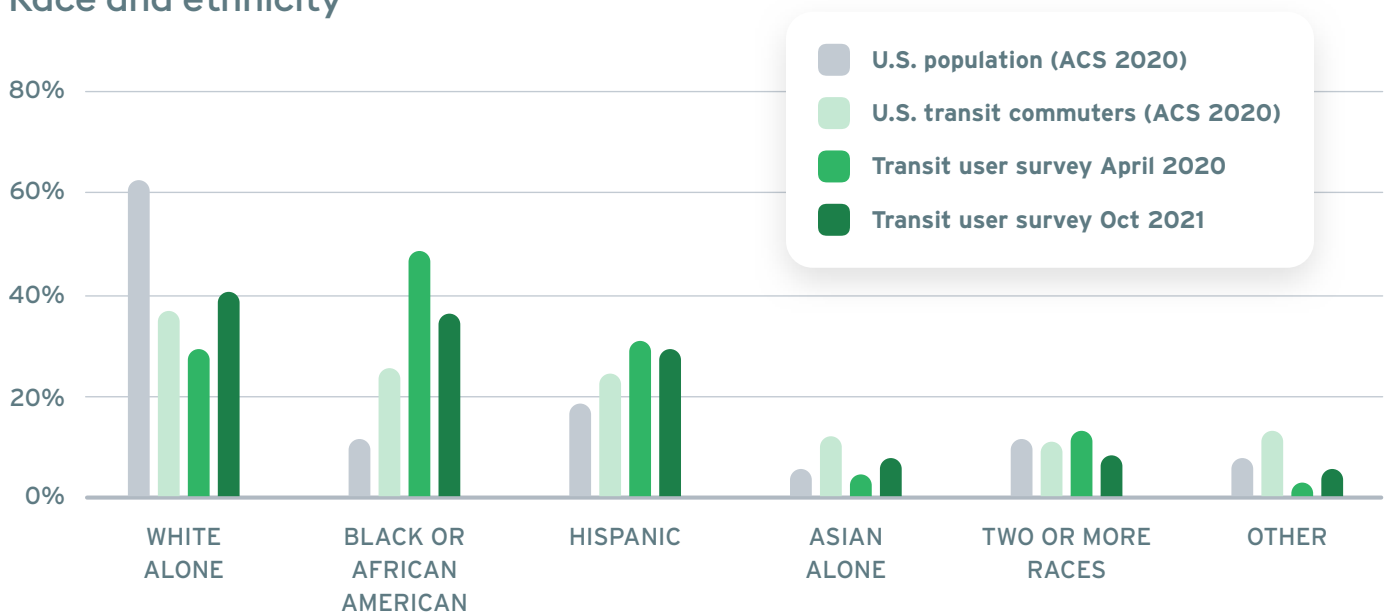
About *Transit's* user demographics

Transit's user demographics are representative of, and in many cases even more diverse than, public transit ridership overall.

Like public transit ridership as a whole, *Transit's* user demographics have changed with the pandemic. In **April 2020**, Black and Latino riders made up more than 60% of our users, while more than 70% of our users made less than \$50,000 a year and just 5% made more than \$100,000.

Since then, more White and higher-income users have returned but riders in households earning less than \$50,000 (60%), as well as Black (28%) and Hispanic (30%) riders, continue to make up the majority of *Transit's* users. Notably, these groups comprise a greater share of *Transit* app users than of regular public transit commuters in the **2020 experimental estimates** from the U.S. Census American Community Survey.

Race and ethnicity



Transit works with agencies to provide insights that help improve service planning and the rider experience. Learn more and sign your transit agency up for detailed quarterly surveys of your riders at transitapp.com/happiness.