

Nine of 10 county residents use pathways, survey says

By Michael Polhamus Jackson Hole Daily | Posted: Friday, May 8, 2015 4:30 am

Nine of 10 people who responded to a recent survey said they use Teton County's pathways and trails, with half of respondents saying they use them frequently.

Overall, respondents said they use pathways, trails, sidewalks and cycle lanes almost every other day in the summer and once every three days in the winter.

About a quarter of those surveyed said they use pathways to commute and to get from one place to the next, while around half said they use pathways for recreational purposes as well.

Those numbers are exceptional compared with other communities in the West, said analysts from the company that conducted the survey.

"Every community says they're exceptional and likes to think they are, and you truly are," said Chris Mehl, policy director of Headwaters Economics in Bozeman, Montana. Headwaters Economics conducted the survey, which was prepared by RRC Associates of Boulder, Colorado.

"You have a community, both town and county, that's incredibly engaged in your overall trails and pathways system," Mehl said. "It speaks well of your community. That is something that's rare.

"We work with a lot of communities across the West, and you're definitely in the top tier, both in terms of use and the trails and pathways you have," Mehl said.

Only 9 percent of survey respondents said they do not use the trails and pathways interspersed throughout the town and county.

"I don't fault them, I just think they're missing out," Friends of Pathways Executive Director Katherine Dowson said.

Of the 23 percent of respondents who use pathways for commuting and other forms of transportation, Dowson said they "can make quite an impact in the summer when we have traffic congestion."

"I think every little bit helps," she said.

It's important to keep in mind that the numbers don't represent only the people who use the 10-foot-wide pathways separated entirely from roadways, Friends of Pathways Program Director Jack Koehler said.

Survey questions directed people to include in their pathways use all nonmotorized travel venues, including sidewalks, cycle tracks and bike lanes, in addition to separated pathways, he said.

Respondents were also instructed to count each trip to a destination in their counts of pathway usage, he said.

What that means is that a person who cycles to work in a bike lane, walks on a sidewalk to lunch and back, and then cycles home from work will have for the purposes of the survey made four trips on pathways that day.

The survey collected responses from 1,179 Teton County residents. Around 400 of those responded to one of 2,500 surveys mailed to a random sample of county residents in November. Another nearly 800 respondents submitted their responses through an online survey.

Results from the online survey were weighted to ensure those numbers didn't skew results from the random sample, Dowson said, but the results were combined because responses from both groups were so similar.

The survey, released to the public this week, was paid for through a grant from Jackson's LOR Foundation, whose goal, Dowson said, "is to enhance livability in the Intermountain West."