

Downtown Minneapolis' Mode Split- Where did it come from and how is it calculated?
by Charles Carlson

A popular figure quoted before and during the bus strike was “40% of downtown Minneapolis workers commute by bus”. This statement was used frequently by governments, newspapers, transit advocates, and other groups weighing in on the bus strike. The number, 40%, had become highly popular, but few explained what the number measured, sources, or calculations. The following is a brief background summary of that figure.

First, we must set up the measurements. Many different kinds of trips enter downtown every day: work trips, shopping trips, leisure trips, etc. The sum of all these trips is the “total trips” entering downtown. Second, what area is considered downtown? The core of downtown is used much more intensely than the fringes. Transit service at 7th & Nicollet (the prime land value intersection) is far higher than one finds at the surface parking-surrounded auto-oriented businesses on the edges. Third, there is great temporal variation in mode split. Inbound peak period riders rely on bus service more than nighttime traffic.

So the question is: what is the best measure of mode split? Do we use peak period trips? What about the peak hour? Or do we look at a 24 hour span? Do we consider the entire downtown? Or focus on the CBD? Should all trips be considered, or just work trips? The way one answers this question becomes very important in determining downtown Minneapolis' mode split.

“Downtown Minneapolis” has about 125,000 jobs, as of the 2000 census. If, as popular claims say, 40% of downtown workers take the bus to work, that would mean 50,000 people riding into downtown everyday, just for work. This is not the case. In reality, the census question “how do you get to work?” for downtown Minneapolis workers amounts to a 25% transit use rate. But when do these 25,000 workers arrive? And how many non-work trips are covered by Metro Transit entering downtown? This covers the entire downtown, 24 hours a day, work trips only. The following table is a list of more situations, leading to the popularly misinterpreted “40%”.

Source, mode split (transit), and scope of several “mode split” measurements.

Census results	25%	All downtown, All day, work trips only
Cordon Count- Mpls plan (1995)	34%	All trips, Peak Period
Employer survey	40%	Work trips, peak hour
TBI survey	36-41%	All downtown, peak period, work trips
TBI survey	43-44%	All downtown, peak hour, work trips
Minneapolis downtown transportation plan	24-58%	Depending on location, peak period
Metro Council, TBI	26.5%	Entire day (avg inbound/outbound)
Metro Council, TBI	39%	Peak period (avg inbound/outbound periods)
Met Council, TBI	44%	Peak HOUR (avg)