

Light Rail Transit Ridership Survey: Cedar Riverside Station

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Conducted on behalf of the West Bank Community Development Corporation
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Since the completion of the light rail in December of 2004, a number of changes have taken place. In an effort to determine the impact of the light rail on the Cedar Riverside community, including both private residents and businesses, we conducted a survey of riders' use of public transit, businesses and services and their views of the neighborhood in which the Cedar-Riverside station is located.

Outline of participants:

Surveys were conducted between 7 am and 10 pm, Monday through Sunday. Approximately half (49/101) were completed in April of 2005 while the rest were done between December 2005 and January 2006. Respondents had varied demographic characteristics. Of those who participated, 69 were male and 30 were female, 46 white and 52 non-white (47 African). The average age was 33 (the highest was 69 and the lowest 17). A significant proportion were residents of the neighborhood (42), and almost as many worked in the area (37).

Light Rail Impact:

Respondents were asked a number of questions designed to establish an understanding of the patterns and purposes of light rail use to and from this particular station. Whether they were inbound or outbound and what direction they were traveling was recorded. They were asked how often they used the light rail, how satisfied they were with it, and what the purpose of their current trip was. Residents were also asked how much of an impact they felt the light rail had on employment opportunities.

Overall, the most popular reason given for the use of the light rail was shopping, with 31 respondents answering. There were a multitude of "other" responses, ranging from travel (to or from the airport) to attending a court hearing. Other was the second most popular response, with 24 overall. Going to work followed, with 23 responses, then going home, with 13. Twelve were going to school and 7 were using the light rail for social reasons.

Among residents, the most popular reason for travel was work (11), followed by other (9), and shopping (8). Non-residents were mostly shopping (13), again closely followed by "other," (12) and work was third (11). Home (9) and school (8) were nearly as frequent.

Furthermore, of the people who identified as "shopping," nearly 75% (14:5) were outbound and presumably doing their shopping elsewhere. Given variations in how the question was understood (many people seemed to interpret the question as asking the trip overall rather than where they were now heading), the percentage of people shopping in the area may be much lower.

What this suggests is that few people see the Cedar-Riverside Business District as a destination. People either work, go to school, or live in the area, and use transit to take them to and from their obligatory activities.

Of the people who participated in the survey, the median frequency for use of the light rail was “several times a week.” (Respondents chose between six options: every day, several times a week, about once a week, a few times a month, once a month, and less than once a month.) The average frequency was 2.49, or somewhere between several times a week and about once a week. Satisfaction was high, with “very satisfied” being by far the most commonly chosen option. (The options to this question were very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied, and very dissatisfied). Again, the average was somewhat lower, at only 1.30, or somewhere between very satisfied and satisfied.

Of the 35 residents who responded to the question about what kind of impact the light rail had on their employment opportunities, the vast majority (26) said that it had increased their options. One claimed it had decreased them, and 8 said that there was no effect on employment available to them.

The light rail serves community members well, allowing people who work in the area to get to work more conveniently and opening up new opportunities for quality employment to residents. It provides reliable service to and from daily activities, as well as connecting people to a wider variety of shopping locales. The frequency with which it’s used suggests that it has already become an essential fixture of many people’s lives. It has not yet, however, begun bringing significantly more consumers to the Cedar-Riverside Business District. While passengers traveling to or from the transit station may be spending more time and money in the area, few people are using the light rail solely to travel to the neighborhood to shop. The majority of the surveys were completed during the day, however, so it’s possible that evening or nighttime entertainments may be more of a draw.

Consumer views:

The survey asked a variety of questions regarding perception of the Cedar-Riverside Business district and for what purposes people use the services offered. Respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with the area and its attractiveness. They were also asked to rate the importance of better lighting, cleaner sidewalks and streets, cleaner stores or restaurants and asked what other services they’d like to see in the area.

The majority of respondents said that they had used the businesses in the area in the last year (74, compared to 24 who hadn’t). Of these, the median grading of satisfaction was “satisfied” (of the options very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied, and very dissatisfied). The average ranking of satisfaction was higher, 1.57 or somewhere between very satisfied and satisfied.

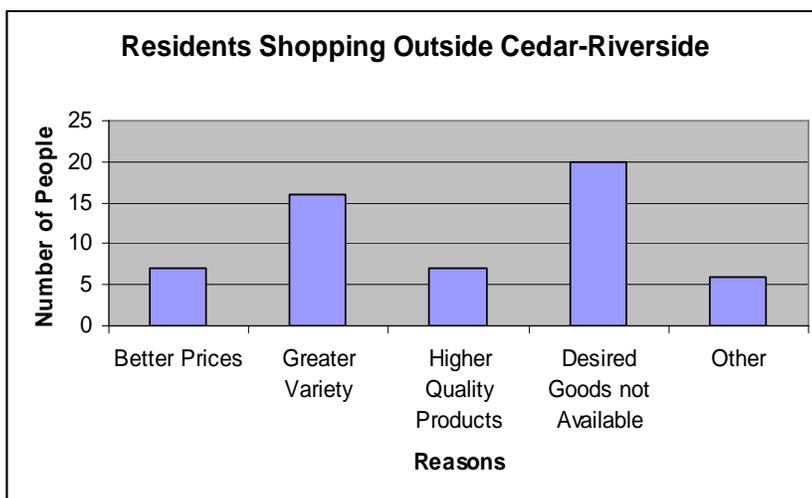
The most popular explanations volunteered in explanation for the level of satisfaction were first the quality of service. Second most common was the convenience of the area, followed by “good food” and then “great people”. Another popular response was the diversity of the area, followed by the quality and variety of products and stores.

All respondents were asked how attractive they found the area, and the median response was “somewhat attractive.” (The options were very attractive, somewhat attractive, not very attractive, and not at all attractive.) The average was somewhat lower, at 2.09, or somewhere between somewhat attractive and not very attractive.

Explanations volunteered for why it’s attractive were its diversity and uniqueness. The next most common justifications for the ranking was that it’s dirty and poorly maintained and dangerous. Community was another positive reason for its attractiveness, as was convenience and that businesses are locally owned.

While individual shopping experiences satisfy customers of the area, there’s a great deal people would like to see changed. Though some of the responses may have been colored by wintertime dissatisfaction, there is a definite concern about outdoor cleanliness and how well the buildings and sidewalks are maintained by their caretakers, as well as the safety of the neighborhood.

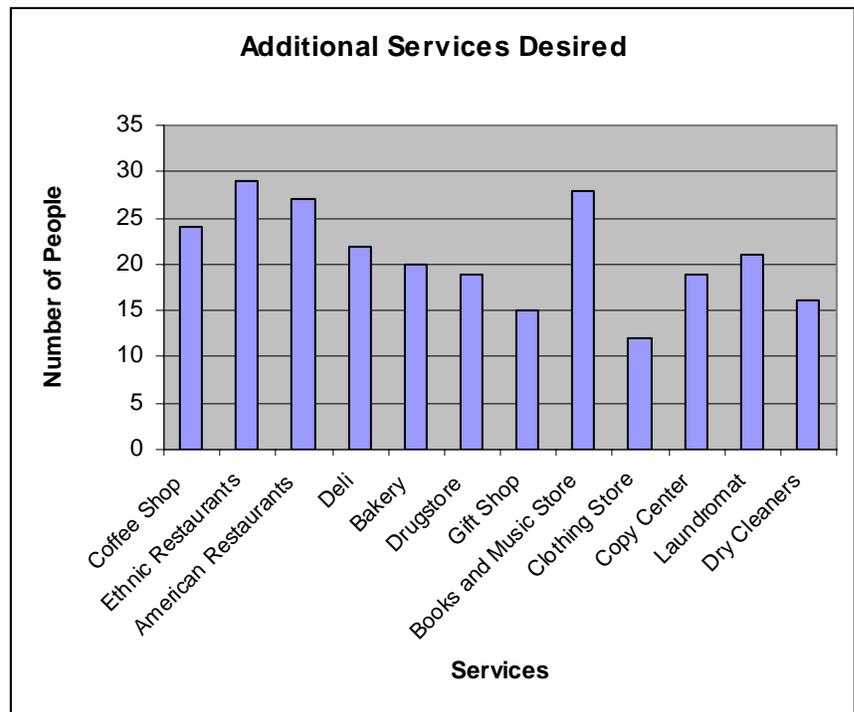
This concern for certain community features is backed up by another question, in which respondents were asked to rate how important each of three things were to the area: better lighting, cleaner sidewalks or streets, and cleaner stores and restaurants. While the median ranking for better lighting and cleaner sidewalks or streets was very important, cleaner stores or restaurants was most often rated only important. (Options were very important, somewhat important, and not very important.) Averages of the rankings show more variation, with cleaner sidewalks or streets most important (1.48, or between very and somewhat important), followed by better lighting (1.53, also between very and somewhat important), and cleaner stores or restaurants is lowest (at 1.83, between very and somewhat important, as well).



Residents were asked an additional question regarding the reasons they shop outside the neighborhood. The most popular reason was that goods or services wanted are not found in the area, with a number of people mentioning grocery stores, large discount stores, and clothing stores as a lack. The next most popular response was that there is a greater variety of goods elsewhere, followed by lower

prices and quality of goods as the final two reasons people elected to shop outside their own neighborhood.

Both residents and non-residents were asked what additional services they'd like to see in the area. A grocery store was the most common response, followed by a post office. The third most popular response was safety; while these responses ranged from a police presence to better lighting, there were a significant number of people interested in having increased levels of safety. The next two most common responses were fast food restaurants and a gym, and then more parking, a bank, a pharmacy, and a library.



Those options were volunteered; respondents came up with them on their own. Additionally, people were asked to select from a list what additional businesses they would like to see. Of the list, a store that sells books and music was most popular, followed by additional ethnic restaurants and then a drug store.

Conclusions:

While the restaurants in the area are diverse enough to be a draw to many non-residents, for the most part, businesses in the Cedar-Riverside area are used for the sake of convenience. Residents shop at them because they're nearby and people using the light rail stop on their way home or to work.

Many people have an instinctive appreciation of the brightly colored facades and unique storefronts of the locally owned businesses in the area, but, while they appreciate the personalized service they receive in such establishments, there is some desire for services provided elsewhere. People who are not residents of the area were particularly inclined to lament the lack of stores selling everyday items like pharmacies, banks, and post offices, as well as convenient places to get lunch and fast food restaurants. Book and music stores were also popularly listed as something that should be added. A post office and large grocery stores like Cub or Rainbow foods were popular suggestions among residents.

Furthermore, there were significant safety concerns. While there was no question specifically addressing night-time safety, a number of respondents volunteered the opinion that the neighborhood is perfectly safe during the day and not at all at night. This is supported by the weight people put on the need for better lighting; most considered it very important. People who completed surveys during the winter were also concerned about the safety of streets and sidewalks inadequately cleared of snow.

While the perception of how attractive the area is varies, residents are much more likely to describe it as attractive. The reasons for such variation may be in the interpretation of the term “attractive”; residents cited the community atmosphere and number of people of their ethnicity as major reasons high rankings, while non-residents cited storefronts as a reason for attractiveness but inadequate cleanliness as a negative.