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“Keep Moving”: West LA Vehicle Residents Survey

a Venice Justice Committee Report

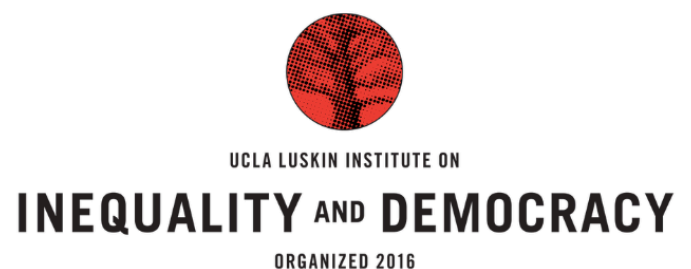


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The Venice Justice Committee is a coalition of community activists, unhoused and vehicle-housed people, researchers and attorneys. Founded by Peggy Lee Kennedy and Calvin Moss, they have worked for the civil and human rights of unhoused people in Los Angeles for nearly two decades.

The UCLA Luskin Institute on Inequality and Democracy advances research and scholarship concerned with displacement and dispossession in Los Angeles and elsewhere in the world. Working in alliance with social movements and communities on the frontlines of struggle, the Institute seeks to abolish structures of inequality.

Cover photo by Peggy Lee Kennedy.

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*Denotes co-first authorship.

FOREWORD

Los Angeles is a starkly unequal city, one in which the accumulation of wealth in gated and guarded estates rests upon the impoverishment of workers and tenants. At the UCLA Luskin Institute on Inequality and Democracy we have repeatedly asked ourselves what housing justice might look like in a city such as this. One answer to this question has been our resolute focus on the unhousing of people and our unrelenting critique of state violence against those who have been rendered homeless. Despite the liberal promise of shelter in the form of programs such as the Mayor’s Inside Safe, it is clear to us that the main strategy of managing mass homelessness is banishment. While we know how this impacts encampment residents, vehicle residents have often been overlooked. *“Keep Moving”* fills this gap by bringing into focus the forced mobility imposed on those relegated to live in their cars, vans, RVs and other vehicles. It exposes the perverse investment of public funds in criminalization and reminds us of viable policy options such as parking stability, supportive services, and housing.

For us at the Institute, research justice is a crucial part of housing justice. This entails research that takes seriously the aspirations, analysis, and arguments put forth by those on the frontlines of dispossession and displacement. We are thrilled that Sam Lutzker was selected for our Mellon Foundation Scholar-in-Community award and that Sam utilized these resources to support the work of Venice Justice Committee, one of the city’s most significant housing justice organizations.

We invite you to read and share this report and to take up the call for change put forth by the Venice Justice Committee.

Ananya Roy

Director, UCLA Luskin Institute on Inequality and Democracy

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2024 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Point-in-Time Count documented 13,549 vehicle dwellings across the Greater Los Angeles Continuum of Care, including 6,854 recreational vehicles (RVs), 3,709 cars and 2,986 vans¹. Despite making up a majority of the “unsheltered homeless,” little is known about these vehicle residents besides an accompanying demographic survey. What little information does circulate is usually prompted by a mix of government officials publicizing operations to resolve vehicular homelessness (as they see it) and conventionally housed neighbors complaining to the media. This report takes a different path: **as organizers working with vehicle residents, Venice Justice Committee is dedicated to advocating for better policies that will genuinely support them.** To formulate better policies, however, we knew we had to understand vehicle residents better than we already did, even as a group that includes people with lived experiences of vehicle residency². As such, beginning in February 2024 **we undertook a one-year, face-to-face survey of 99 vehicle residents residing in West LA**, largely within the boundaries of Council District 11. The patterns we found, however, are near-certainly present across other parts of the City of Los Angeles and municipalities across California, as much of what we heard and observed were due to an established policy paradigm for resolving vehicular homelessness. Drawing upon survey data bolstered with qualitative reflections, our key findings are as follows:

The Vehicle Dwelling is a Personal Safety Net

Most vehicle residents we surveyed lived in an apartment or house immediately prior to moving into a vehicle, including housing they rented alone (28%) or with roommates (26%), or even owned (8%). Nearly one-quarter lived in a friend or family member’s housing, usually “doubled-up,” while 12% were street homeless (i.e., in a tent or hard-sleeping) immediately prior to moving into a vehicle. 58% had stayed on the streets or in shelter at some point in their lives. **Given that the most popular reasons for leaving their prior setting were affordability (26%), issues with people they were living with (19%), eviction or foreclosure (13%), quality of shelter or housing (12%), and a dangerous environment (9%), and that over two-thirds of vehicle residents cited the relative quality or safety of a vehicle dwelling as key factors influencing their decision**

¹ For a summary of the 2024 Greater LA Homeless Count results, please see: <https://www.lahsa.org/documents?id=8164-2024-greater-los-angeles-homeless-count-results-long-version-.pdf>.

² We use the term “vehicle residents” to refer to all people who live in vehicles, including those who are unhoused, housed or somewhere in between. As developed by Dr. Graham Pruss of the National Vehicle Residency Collective, this terminology recognizes the assets of vehicle dwellings and is more inclusive than terms like “vehicular homelessness,” which we still use but more selectively.

to move into a vehicle, we conceptualize the vehicle dwelling as a form of personal safety net in the context of the United States’ abysmal social safety net. Given an average (mean) reported monthly income of \$801, with 82% below the 2025 federal poverty line, vehicle residents were generally very low-income. While 41% of vehicle residents identified as disabled, only 38% of disabled vehicle residents received SSI/SSDI, meaning many relied on more meager forms of government support or work to make ends meet. And even among those receiving SSI/SSDI, an average (mean) monthly income of \$1,404 can’t even cover average rent for a studio apartment in Los Angeles (\$1,703/month). These facts complicate and even contradict the public safety and public health rationales used by city and county authorities to dispossess vehicle residents of their dwellings. Removing someone’s personal safety net in an effort to push them into accepting whatever is offered to them (if anything) is contradictory to developing a more robust social safety net, which is badly needed in the United States.

Vehicle Residents are Forced into Mobility through Criminalization

Many vehicle residents have to alternate between overnight and daytime parking spots due to parking regulations (including those targeting RVs), police move-along orders, targeted sweeps³, and conflict with housed neighbors and businesses, including instances of illegal harassment from private security. A majority of vehicle residents had more than one overnight parking spot over the past month, with 25% having four or more spots. **The most popular reasons a vehicle resident left their prior overnight parking location were because they were told to move by city/county authorities (38%), followed by issues with neighboring housed residents (15%) or businesses (13%), and citations (9%). While vehicle residents sought new locations for their favorable qualities and to avoid conflicts with parking enforcement and neighbors, over 75% of vehicle residents shared that they’d experienced harassment in the past month because they live in a vehicle, with the top sources of harassment being police and housed neighbors.** Given issues with demonstrating that their dwellings are fully “street legal” (i.e., registered, insured, operable and with proof of ownership), vehicle residents can be targeted by parking enforcement for ticketing and towing, which sets them back in their efforts to find stability in their vehicle dwellings. **Nearly two-thirds of vehicle residents owed some amount in parking tickets, with 22% owing more than \$1,500 on their dwelling alone (i.e., not counting transportation vehicles). Nearly half have lost a vehicle dwelling to towing at some point in their lives, while 15% experienced impoundment of their vehicle dwelling over the last year.** Three of our participants were still street homeless at the time we surveyed them because their vehicle dwelling had

³ A “sweep” refers to a government operation to temporarily or permanently displace people rendered homeless from a site using sanitation as a rationale; sometimes shelter or housing resources are offered.

been impounded within the past few months. While most vehicle residents we surveyed could qualify for LA’s Community Assistance Parking Program, which clears up to \$1,500 in City parking tickets if one is unhoused and performs community service, only 6% of vehicle residents had ever used the program and many didn’t know it existed; further, there are barriers to enrollment such as requiring that one has access to a phone. On the whole, criminalization comes in many forms and contributes to vehicle residents’ forced mobility, which in turn makes social services outreach more difficult. Current efforts to mitigate criminalization are inadequate and the costs of criminalization too high.

Social Services Outreach to Vehicle Residents is Inadequate and Inconsistent

In part due to vehicle residents’ forced mobility, social services outreach to vehicle residents lacks substantial offers and follow-through. **59% of vehicle residents surveyed said they’d received no shelter or housing “offers” over the prior three months. While 38% had received some form of offer, many of these offers were vague and seemingly superficial,** with the most common being for unspecified “housing” followed by shelter beds and motel rooms. Despite this, **nearly three-quarters of vehicle residents who received such an offer either outright accepted or asked for more information, but social services follow-through was poor: over 60% shared that no one followed up with them about the offer, while 29% were put on a “waitlist.”** While doing survey outreach, we witnessed outreach workers offer “housing” when they clearly didn’t have any resources as a way to catalyze conversation as well as vehicle residents being cited and impounded who told us they were on “waitlists.” While government officials and some service providers paint those who deny these offers as “service resistant,” those who denied them shared that their most common reasons for doing so were due to lacking trust, mismatched offers, and lacking recognition of the value (both symbolic and material) of their vehicle dwellings. Increasingly common tactics of asking that vehicle residents give up their dwellings in exchange for shelter/housing, including efforts at the California State level to allow destruction of more impounded RVs (e.g., Assembly Bill 630, which we discuss in “policy recommendations”), are counterproductive to developing the trust required to bring folks indoors. **We argue that narratives of vehicle residents’ so-called “service resistance” ought to be recast as narratives of their logical “service hesitancy” amid a risky environment of insufficient housing resources, disorganized outreach, and politically driven operation planning.**

Vehicle Residents Desire Parking Stability, Supportive Services and Affordable Housing

Despite the negativity directed at vehicle residents by local politicians and issues with inadequate and insufficient social services outreach, **vehicle residents remain on**

the whole interested in a wide range of shelter/housing and supportive service programs. The most popular among these, with 82% and 77% of vehicle residents saying they'd participate if offered, were housing vouchers and low-income reserved apartments. This is notable in light of the Trump administration's proposed defunding of Section 8 housing vouchers and Right-wing attacks on "Housing First," an evidence-based model for moving unhoused people from the streets directly into housing with supportive services. But locally, Democratic politicians sometimes block affordable housing from being built due to NIMBY (i.e., "not in my backyard") opposition. This is the case with Venice Dell, which would supply 120 units of affordable housing with supportive services for people experiencing homelessness and low-income tenants, but which has been stalled by Council District 11 representative Traci Park, City Attorney Hydee Feldstein Soto, and Mayor Karen Bass. This is inexcusable given West LA's history of racist and classist exclusion and inequitable patterns of affordable housing development. Beyond calling for an expansion of affordable housing development and voucher programs, Venice Justice Committee calls for supportive services and parking stability. **Supportive services includes programs like medical/dental care, which was desired by over two-thirds of vehicle residents surveyed, as well as vehicle repair assistance.** In order to provide these services and transition interested vehicle residents into conventional housing amid a tight supply, parking stability will be necessary. **We envision parking stability as a best-practices principle for supporting and engaging vehicle residents on their housing journeys. It can include appropriately sited street parking, 24/7 safe parking programs with low-barrier to entry, and stable parking programs in the vein of subsidized RV parks.** Unfortunately, some of the best places for overnight RV street parking such as next to parks have been targeted to exclude vehicle residents from staying there. We believe community good neighbor agreements could be used at such sites to ensure that mutual respect between all community stakeholders flourishes, including housed community members

We end with a call to advocacy for vehicle residents from the local to national level as a way to band together for not only housing justice but connected struggles of climate justice and racial justice. For the UCLA Luskin Institute on Inequality and Democracy's 2025 Distinguished Lecture in Ideas and Organizing⁴, renowned journalist Naomi Klein laid out our societal choice in stark terms: "Fascism or Eco-Populism." **As housing becomes more scarce and climate change pushes more people to migrate, vehicle residency will increase. As a society, we must learn to adapt with that, as the alternative will abandon the human rights so integral to our democracy.**

⁴ To view a recording of the lecture, please see:
<https://challengeinequality.luskin.ucla.edu/naomi-klein/>.

BACKGROUND

“Keep Moving” is both an order and practical advice, a testament to the forced mobility of vehicle residents due to government “sweeps,” police move-along orders, discriminatory parking ordinances, and harassment from neighbors and private security. The phrase stuck in report co-author Sam Lutzker’s mind after fellow co-author Peggy Lee Kennedy shared with him practical advice for how vehicle residents can remain below the radar of an increasingly hostile government which spans from Council District 11 (covering much of West LA) to the City of Los Angeles, and from other municipalities to the State of California and beyond. Over and over again as we conducted the survey, we heard vehicle residents discuss similar advice as well as instances where they were forced to move. Their movements varied in scale, regularity and intensity, but movement was a common denominator among most (if not all) vehicle residents we spoke with. While some movement is associated with freedom, it is forced mobility and associated forms of criminalization that harm vehicle residents. Further, forced mobility disrupts opportunities for supportive services and connections to affordable housing. Our report’s cover photo references a multi-week sweep that occurred in summer 2023 along Jefferson Boulevard in the Ballona Wetlands, an event which also catalyzed our idea for an electronic, in-depth, face-to-face survey with vehicle residents across West LA.

For the past two decades, Venice Justice Committee organizers have been monitoring harmful homeless sweeps in and around Venice, the gentrifying West LA neighborhood famous for its beachy counterculture. Besides providing evidence to civil rights attorneys and running free legal clinics, we try to experiment with strategies that can positively impact how unhoused and poor people are treated. We originally began doing paper surveys in spring 2022, initially as a collaboration between Venice Justice Committee and Street Watch LA. The idea was to collect information from the unhoused who were about to be swept and use it to advocate with the Council District 11 representative at that time, Mike Bonin. The first paper survey was of an encampment at the park next to Venice Library, which had grown following enforcement at the beach and in the Special Enforcement Cleaning Zone around a now-closed shelter¹. The second paper survey was of the vehicle camp along Jefferson Boulevard which, while effective at spurring then-Councilman Mike Bonin to procure over \$2.2

¹ While shelters are not housing, they remain important as an emergency response to homelessness. Council District 11 is now one of only two Los Angeles council districts to not have a Bridge Home shelter. Further, when faced with extreme and possibly deadly weather events, Council District 11 under Traci Park has consistently failed to open emergency inclement weather shelters within its borders, nor have they coordinated bus pick-up to connect the unhoused with shelters elsewhere.

million for a housing intervention², was ultimately too little too late. The funding was dismissed after Traci Park was elected to represent Council District 11, and soon after ushered in a strategy of intensified sweeps with less attention to housing.

It was under these conditions that Venice Justice Committee organizers returned to Jefferson Boulevard in summer 2023 to survey vehicle residents as they faced a multi-week sweep that would ultimately lead to their displacement. While we documented mostly superficial outreach and the occasional offer of a motel room (but only in exchange for giving up one’s vehicle dwelling), our efforts to move the City to shift their operation were ignored³. While the operation was lauded by Councilmember Park’s office and a local environmental group as a success⁴, it was clearly a failure in terms of its housing efforts, for which the official statistics were never publicly shared.

In response to such sweeps and lack of transparency, Venice Justice Committee doubled down on our survey strategy. We moved our survey online to prevent paper bottlenecks, deepened our questions, and employed scientific survey methods to enhance the representativeness and validity of our findings. While our survey focused on West LA, particularly within Council District 11, our findings are about much more than the miserable model of governance employed by Traci Park. It is about a coalescing strategy across municipalities that displaces and disposses vehicle residents in an effort to discipline and push them into whatever program government officials are pushing at the time. This survey report is a check on that gross strategy, and we hope other grassroots organizations will see that it is possible to use such methods to challenge similar structures of power where they live and beyond.

² For reference to Councilmember Bonin’s motion to fund housing for Jefferson Boulevard’s encampment residents, please see: https://clkrep.lacity.org/online/docs/2022/22-1326_misc_11-4-22.pdf.

³ Some of these efforts were documented in a video produced by *Invisible People*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8cKp5r3R788>.

⁴ For more on the disjuncture between environmental restoration and housing rights at the Ballona Wetlands, as well as a possible solution to this tension, please see: Peters, Deike and Sam Lutzker. 2025. “A Crisis of Habitation in LA’s Last Remaining Wetland.” *Metropolitics*. <https://metropolitics.org/A-Crisis-of-Habitation-in-LA-s-Last-Remaining-Wetland.html>.

DATA AND METHODS

As participatory research¹, our survey was designed, fielded, and interpreted collectively within our team of community-based organizers and researchers. Building off practices and insights from Venice Justice Committee’s paper surveys (discussed in “Background”), we decided upon a digital format that would bypass printing and copying logistics. Due to its availability, we chose the digital application SurveyMonkey for survey design, implementation and data collection. Survey questions were drafted and tested by our team, which includes people with lived experience of vehicle residency. Survey enumerators were trained in research ethics (including informed consent), study outreach methods, and survey conduct, including a mock survey. Once all data was collected, data cleaning and analysis occurred in Excel, with mapping undertaken in QGIS. All data figures were shared within our team to discuss interpretation. Report writing was also collectively reviewed, with team members editing one another’s work. Ultimately, it was our team’s diversity of experiences and skills, combined with a willingness to learn from one another, that enabled our project to succeed as participatory research.

Survey design and sampling built off Venice Justice Committee’s existing practices, including a focus on visible forms of vehicle residency, including those that can attract negative attention from neighbors and authorities. Survey questions focused on participant experiences of vehicle residency – including vehicle condition, residential trajectories, and interactions with government employees and neighbors – as well as participant preferences for social services and housing. We also collected standard demographic information. Survey questions were created from conversations within our team, with some elements adapted from prior surveys (e.g., the 2023 San José Recreational Vehicle Resident Survey²) as is best practice for comparability. Survey questions were developed using best practices, including automated randomization of “mark all that apply” answer options so as to control for order bias. The survey also included a section for those who had recently lost their vehicle dwelling and were street homeless, though only four of our 99 participants met this criteria.

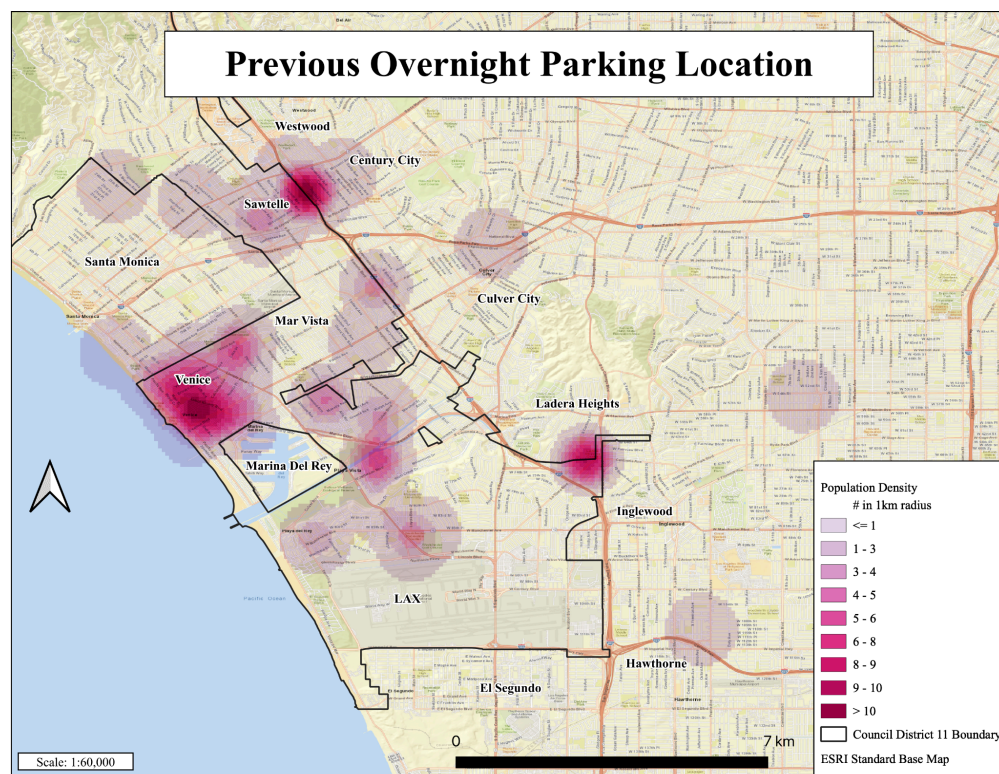
Study outreach was focused upon visible instances of vehicle residency across Los Angeles Council District 11 and just over its borders into Council District 5 and Santa Monica. Figure 1 (below) is a map of where our survey participants parked the

¹ For an overview of participatory research methods and types, please see Vaughn, Lisa M., and Farrah Jacquez. 2020. “Participatory Research Methods – Choice Points in the Research Process.” *Journal of Participatory Research Methods* 1(1). doi: [10.35844/001c.13244](https://doi.org/10.35844/001c.13244).

² The 2023 San José Recreational Vehicle Resident Survey was a collaboration between Destination: Home, the Lived Experience Advisory Board of Silicon Valley, and Developmental Research on Vehicle Residency, LLC. The full report was submitted to the City of San José, but a selection of report findings were published in the City’s Consolidated FY 2023-2024 Homelessness Report (page 14): <https://www.sanjoseca.gov/Home/Components/News/News/6315/4699>.

night prior to when we surveyed them, which gives a sense of our survey’s geographic spread and focus in areas such as Venice, Sawtelle, Playa Vista, Ladera and so on.

Figure 1



Survey enumerators were trained to approach every visible instance of vehicle dwelling along their chosen route, and routes were chosen both for geographic spread and government attention, including scheduled “sweeps” to displace vehicle residents. As such, our survey likely over-sampled certain vehicle types and under-sampled others, which we discuss further in the next section (i.e., “Diversity of Vehicle Residents”). Survey recruitment began in February 2024 and wrapped one-year later, resulting in 99 eligible responses, including 95 current vehicle residents. Those members of our team with lived experience as vehicle residents also participated in the survey as participants. While we initially offered a \$10 cash incentive to participate in the survey, early enumerator feedback led us to switch that to a gift which we’d offer participants once they’d quit or finished the survey³. The average (mean) time to complete the survey was 28 minutes. All responses were anonymized and any names of vehicle residents referred to in this report are pseudonyms.

Survey data cleaning was undertaken in Excel, including the elimination of duplicate responses and re-categorization of select answers (e.g., open-ended “other” responses that corresponded to closed-ended answer options). Survey questions had a very high response rate (i.e., our lowest question response rate was 90%), so the few

³ In particular, one survey enumerator experienced a marked change in the survey interaction when money was mentioned early on.

non-responses to each question were removed when calculating answer percentage figures.

While this is a survey report and we privilege the discussion of our survey data, we also draw upon qualitative observations from our experiences conducting the survey, doing ethnographic fieldwork, and living as locals. Those experiences aided us in our interpretation of survey figures, but we also include several stories as illustrations of survey findings. Given the singular voice of our report, we also separated out several stories and personal reflections to allow for more individuality. That said, we collectively stand by the results of this report as well as our policy recommendations.

The Importance of Trust in Surveying Vehicle Residents **by Pat Raphael**

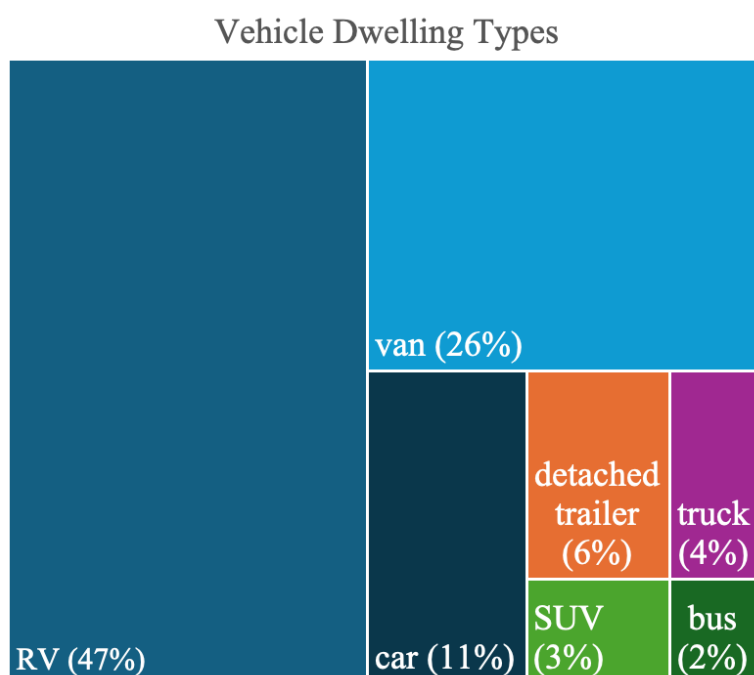
While working with vehicle residents and unhoused populations as a whole, it became clear that trust capital can open many doors and enable deeper reach into the community. It helped that the survey was not the first time we'd been out among the population providing information and offering services. There were survey enumerators who serve in other capacities offering legal aid, who've been around for clothing drives, serving meals, providing tents and sleeping bags. Also, some of us are vehicle dwellers ourselves. These all contributed to a sense that we are allies, and fostered a greater openness to engagement. Yet even with all this, there were members of the population who chose not to participate.

The most common reason that people gave for not wanting to participate in the survey was that they were busy taking care of themselves, engaged in the myriad of daily tasks made more complicated because of vehicle dwelling: charging devices, bathroom and shower, cooking and dining. Others were strictly guarding their privacy and did not wish to disclose personal details, even though we explained that survey data was anonymous. Some thought the survey didn't apply to them, as they weren't "homeless," though we emphasized they didn't have to be to participate, they just had to live in their vehicle. And then there were those who had closed themselves off into their own world, and remained unreachable even after repeated attempts to make contact.

DIVERSITY OF VEHICLE RESIDENTS

Vehicle residents come in many forms, as do the vehicles they live in. At the time of survey, nearly half of our survey participants lived in recreational vehicles (i.e., RVs) and just over one-quarter lived in vans, with the remaining spread across cars, detached trailers, trucks, sports utility vehicles (SUVs) and even buses (see figure 2). Compared to the 2024 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count, which counted 13,549 vehicle dwellings with around half RVs, one-quarter vans and one-quarter cars, our survey numbers are similar save for underrepresentation of cars¹. In addition to sleeping, these vehicles were used for storage (84%), cooking (67%), bathroom (toilet and/or shower, respectively 56% and 43%), and transportation (47%). Most survey participants had only one vehicle, but for those 18% with a second vehicle it was almost always for transportation, including for employment (e.g., a Lyft driver) and towing one’s trailer. No participant had more than three vehicles.

Figure 2



As illustrated in figure 3, vehicle residents skew male (72%) like the homeless population as a whole and unsheltered homelessness in particular, likely due in part to the masculinist environment of the streets. In terms of racial identity, most local vehicle

¹ Los Angeles’ annual homeless count categorizes vehicle dwellings as RVs, vans or cars. Were our survey to apply a similar rule, a higher percentage of participants would be classified as living in “RVs” or “cars” than currently. Notably, homeless count numbers referenced here are for the Greater Los Angeles Continuum of Care and are based on the raw count of vehicle dwellings, not accounting for the dwelling multiplier to estimate population size. For information on the 2024 Greater LA Homeless Count: <https://www.lahsa.org/documents?id=8164-2024-greater-los-angeles-homeless-count-results-long-version.pdf>.

residents surveyed identified as White whether alone or in combination with another racial category (66%), followed by Hispanic or Latino (22%), Native American or Alaska Native (18%), Black or African American (15%), and/or other groups with less than 5% each. Given West LA’s ongoing history of racist White settlement and exclusion, it is not surprising that the local unhoused and vehicle resident populations are Whiter than in other parts of LA. The average (mean) age of vehicle residents we surveyed was 48, with the youngest 23 and the oldest 78. Most (60%) lived alone, though 30% lived with someone else and 10% lived with two or more people, most often a romantic partner, friend or family member. We only surveyed one participant who reported living with children, likely due to both our primarily daytime survey outreach practices and sensitivity of the question. Just under half (46%) of vehicle residents surveyed reported living with pets. In terms of institutional experiences, 9% of vehicle residents surveyed are United States veterans and 6% were on probation or parole at the time of survey.

While there exist only survey samples of the vehicle resident population, making representativeness difficult to estimate, Los Angeles’ annual point-in-time homeless count and accompanying demographic survey provide a useful comparison for our survey. But because we don’t have access to the demographic survey data for local vehicle residents, we instead compare our numbers to those for unsheltered homelessness as a whole in Service Planning Area (SPA) 5², “West LA.” Figure 3 shows that our vehicle resident survey sample is demographically similar to that of unsheltered homelessness in SPA 5 as a whole, albeit noticeably different along the following dimensions: percent female/male, percent American Indian or Alaska Native, percent Black or African American, percent White, and percent aged 25-34, 45-54 or 65 and older. When compared to other forms of unsheltered homelessness, Gamarino, Blumenberg and Brozen (2024³) found among other things that vehicle residents were more likely to be female, White, and Senior (over 62 years old), in part explaining the relative prevalence of these groups within our survey sample. While we possibly under-sampled Black or African American and over-sampled American Indian or Alaska Native vehicle residents⁴, we are unable to reach such a conclusion given unknown population parameters and unavailable survey data with which to compare our results to at a more fine-grained level⁵.

² Homeless count demographic survey results tabulated by service planning area, of which there are eight in the Greater Los Angeles Continuum of Care, along with the unsheltered demographic survey packet are publicly available:
<https://www.lahsa.org/news?article=976-2024-greater-los-angeles-homeless-count-data>.

³ Gamarino, Chris, Evelyn Blumenberg and Madeline Brozen. 2024. “Who Lives in Vehicles and Why? Understanding Vehicular Homelessness in Los Angeles.” *Housing Policy Debate*, 34:1, 25-38.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10511482.2022.2117990>.

⁴ It is also possible that our racial identity survey question enabled participants who would otherwise not be validated as American Indian or Alaska Native to identify as such, producing a higher than expected prevalence.

⁵ We also compared our data to that for RAND’s LA LEADS 2023 Annual Report for unsheltered persons in Venice, but given our survey’s range outside of Venice and exclusive focus on vehicle residents we were only able to compare up to a point. For the annual report, please see Ward, Jason M., Rick Garvey

Figure 3

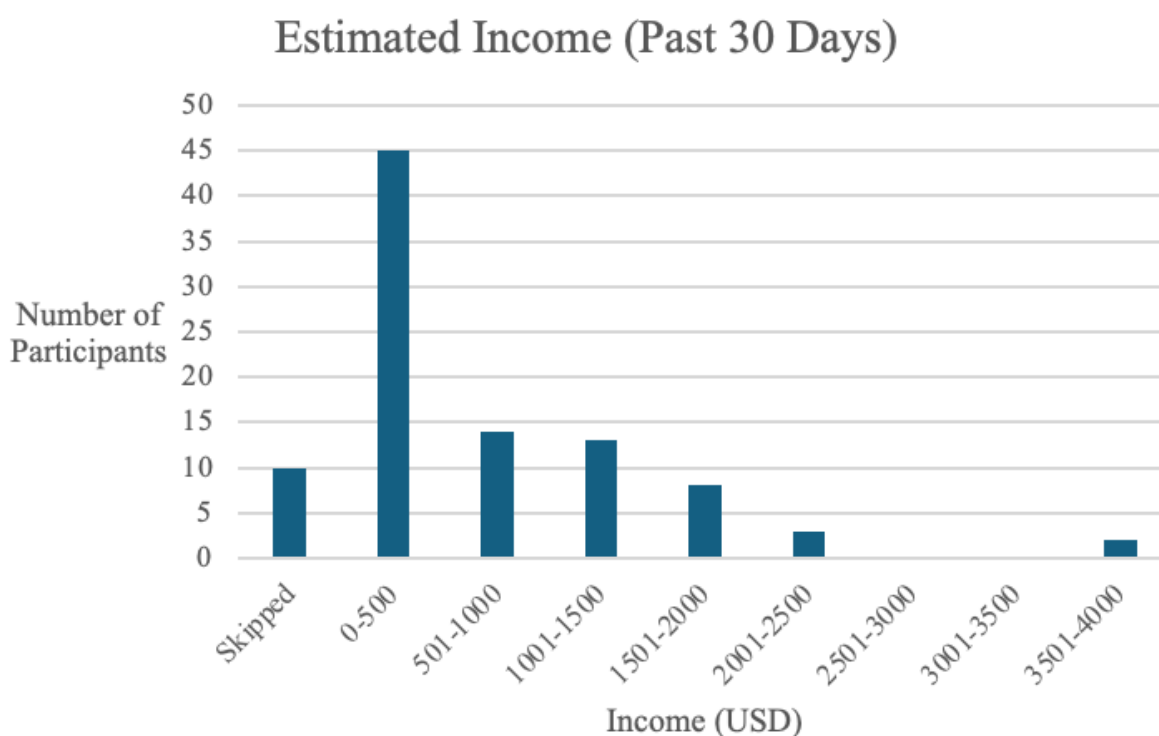
Demographic Characteristics	Percent Prevalence	
	Vehicle Residents Survey (West LA, 2024)	Unsheltered Homeless Survey (SPA 5, 2024)
Gender		
Female	27%	21%
Male	72%	78%
Gender non-conforming (including non-binary)	1%	1%
Race⁶		
American Indian or Alaska Native	18%	6%
Asian or Asian American	4%	2%
Black or African American	15%	30%
Hispanic or Latino	22%	21%
Middle Eastern or North African	3%	0%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	2%	2%
White	66%	46%
Age		
Under 18		3%
18-24	2%	2%
25-34	15%	22%
35-44	21%	22%
45-54	29%	23%
55-64	19%	21%
65 and older	14%	8%
Institutional Experiences		
Veteran (U.S.)	9%	6%
Currently on Probation or Parole	6%	—

and Sarah B. Hunter. 2024. *Annual Trends Among the Unsheltered in Three Los Angeles Neighborhoods: The Los Angeles Longitudinal Enumeration and Demographic Survey (LA LEADS) 2023 Annual Report*. RAND. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1890-4.html

⁶ As with the demographic survey accompanying the homeless count, racial categories include people who identify with each category alone or in combination, meaning multi-racial persons are represented in multiple categories and the tallied percentage for the racial identity question exceeds 100%.

Vehicle residents we surveyed were generally very low-income, with an average (mean) reported monthly income of \$801. While 10 participants skipped this question (see figure 4), this is likely due to the sensitivity of discussing money while living in public parking rather than any pattern of withheld information that would skew our results. A few suspiciously high estimates of income were removed as outliers, and those participants who reported \$0 income sometimes had their answers re-coded given other information provided (e.g., if they were receiving food stamps, which we counted as income). Were we to extrapolate participants’ monthly income to annual income, 82% would be below the 2025 federal poverty line of \$15,650 for a one-person household.

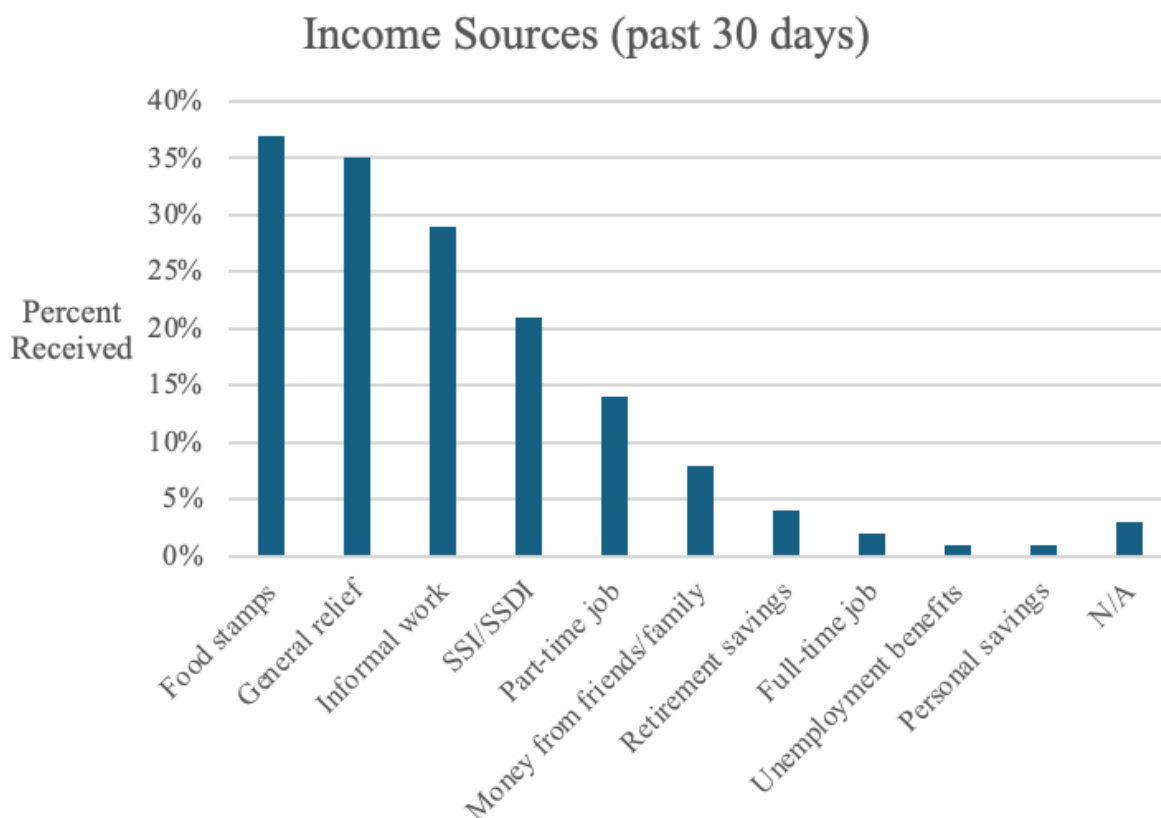
Figure 4



We also asked vehicle residents about the sources of income they received over the past 30 days (see figure 5), and found that 65% received some form of government benefits, whether food stamps, general relief, supplemental security income (SSI), social security disability insurance (SSDI), unemployment or veterans-specific benefits. 38% of vehicle residents received income from work, whether informal, full-time or part-time. Types of work included both informal gig (e.g., mechanic) and platform gig (e.g., Grubhub, Uber Eats, and Amazon Flex), retail both formal like Wal-Mart and informal like working as a vendor on Venice Boardwalk, government (e.g., public library), nonprofits like Santa Monica Pier Corporation and a local church, and (true to LA) a company that pays live audiences for televised tapings. A few vehicle residents (3%) reported receiving no income of any form over the past 30 days, while several specified

responses that didn’t fit into the provided categories, including panhandling, stealing, and proceeds from a lawsuit.

Figure 5



Vehicle residents surveyed included many (41%) who identified as having a “disabling condition.” Of those who identified as disabled, 38% received SSI or SSDI, compared with 7% for those who didn’t identify as disabled. Despite a nearly three-fold difference in rates of work between disabled (20%) and non-disabled (54%) vehicle residents, disabled vehicle residents had a 5% higher average (mean) monthly income. This is likely owing to the prevalence of SSI- or SSDI-receiving individuals among the disabled vehicle resident population, as these individuals’ average (mean) monthly income was \$1,404 compared with an overall sample average of \$801. While further statistical analysis is required to unpack the effect of SSI/SSDI on income, these numbers suggest the importance of specific government benefits for leveling the income difference between disabled and non-disabled vehicle residents; however, the relatively low average income is a reminder that these benefits are still insufficient by themselves to house a vehicle resident in a studio apartment in Los Angeles, which as of May 2025 rented for an average of \$1,703/month⁷. Even if they used the entirety of their monthly income on rent alone, 88% of vehicle residents surveyed wouldn’t have enough money to rent such an apartment.

⁷ For current estimates of monthly average rent in Los Angeles by apartment size and neighborhood, please see: <https://www.apartments.com/rent-market-trends/los-angeles-ca/>.

While the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s technical definition of “chronic homelessness” is notoriously wonky⁸, it roughly translates to those individuals with a disability who have lived in a place not meant for human habitation or shelter for more than 12 months either continuously or across at least four instances over the past three years. While our survey didn’t include the series of questions necessary to calculate the full federal definition of chronic homelessness, we were able to combine our survey’s disability identity question with one about the last time a participant lived in an “apartment, house or institutional setting” to calculate a rough (likely conservative) rate of chronic homelessness among vehicle residents surveyed: 34%. This is similar to the rate of chronic homelessness (38%) calculated for vehicle residents by Giamarino, Blumenberg and Brozen (2024) using the accompanying demographic survey for the 2020 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count.

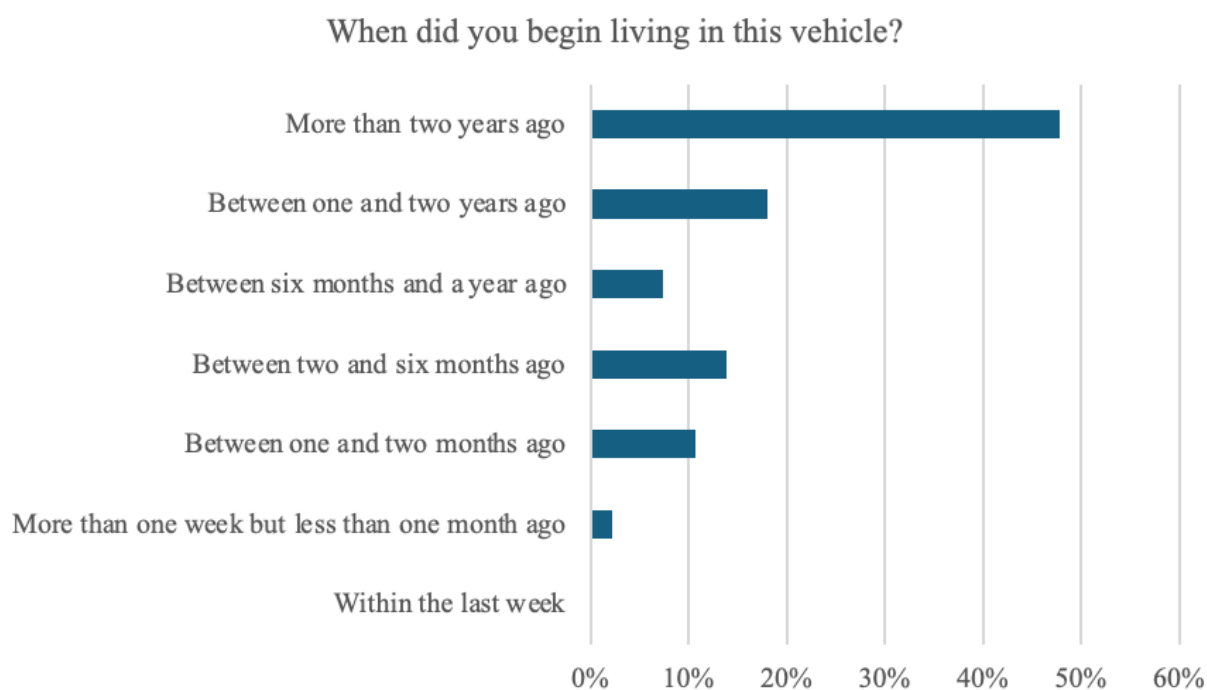
One major caveat about federal definitions of “chronic homelessness” and “unsheltered homelessness” is that they don’t account for ground-up understandings of homelessness, instead imposing top-down standards on diverse groups like vehicle residents who can’t be sufficiently understood using government-driven definitions alone. We asked vehicle residents whether they considered themselves “homeless” and/or “unhoused” and 37% identified with neither label, evoking such responses as “my home is my van.” Even for those who did identify as homeless/unhoused, one participant noted that they felt “address-less,” and that they “wouldn’t feel homeless if [they] had a spot to park.” Such comments remind us that homelessness isn’t as much a naturally occurring condition as it is the outcome of humans navigating human-made structures (like commoditized housing, exclusionary zoning and parking enforcement) that enable homelessness. We turn to some of those pathways into homelessness and vehicle residency in our next section.

⁸ For the technical definition of “chronic homelessness” as put forth by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, please see the relevant section in 24 CFR 578.3: <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-24/subtitle-B/chapter-V/subchapter-C/part-578/subpart-A/section-578.3>.

PATHWAYS TO VEHICLE RESIDENCY

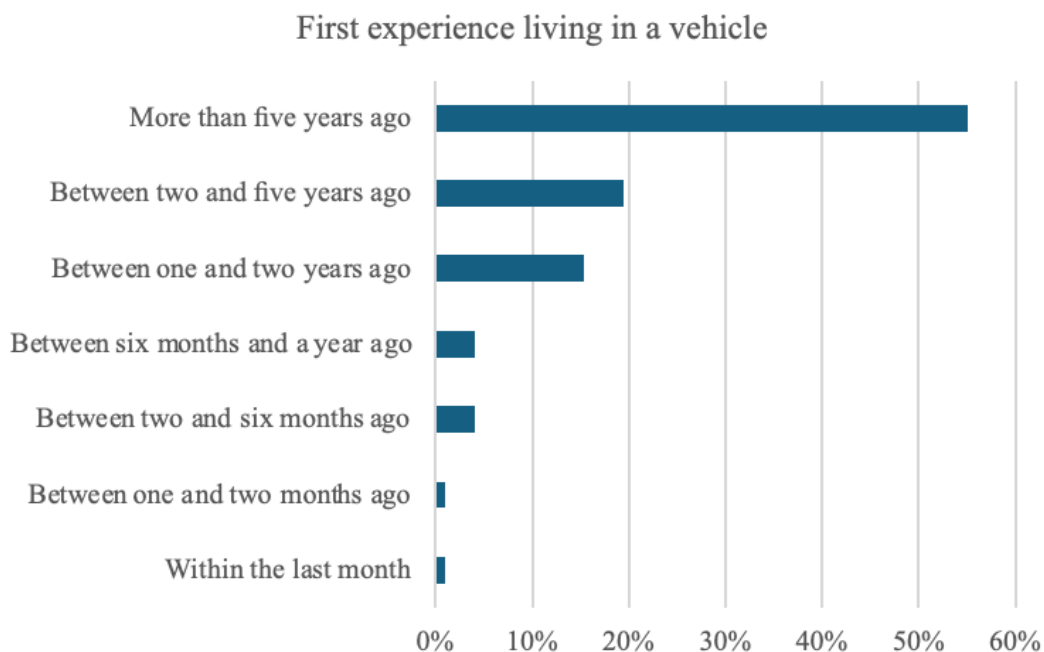
How do people become vehicle residents? What are the push and pull factors? Is vehicle residency a step up, step down or lateral step from their prior housing or shelter circumstances? We sought to answer these and other questions through our survey, to try to place vehicle residency into the unique housing-shelter trajectory of each survey participant. As shown in figure 6, nearly half of vehicle residents we surveyed had been living in their current vehicle for more than two years, including one person who moved into their vehicle 20 years ago as well as two people who’d moved in 10 years ago. Some people were new to living in their current vehicle, with 34% having moved in within the past year.

Figure 6



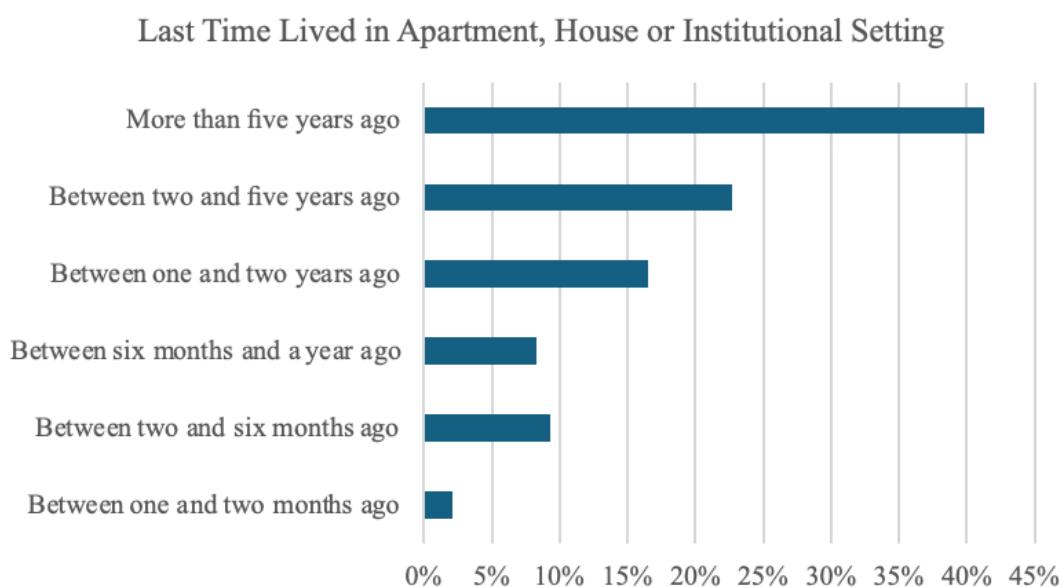
But this was just for their current vehicle, as many participants had prior experiences living in other vehicles, whether contiguous with their stay in their current vehicle or separated by a period in conventional housing or elsewhere. More than half of our survey respondents experienced their first stay in a vehicle more than five years ago (see figure 7). Of course, some people were new to vehicle residency as a whole, with 10% of survey respondents in their first year of living in a vehicle ever. Because of our survey’s focus on visibility, we missed some of the “hidden homeless” who live in less noticeable vehicles like cars and whose experiences may be more difficult to capture in street-based studies due to both temporariness and fear of association with a visible homeless population that is stigmatized and criminalized.

Figure 7



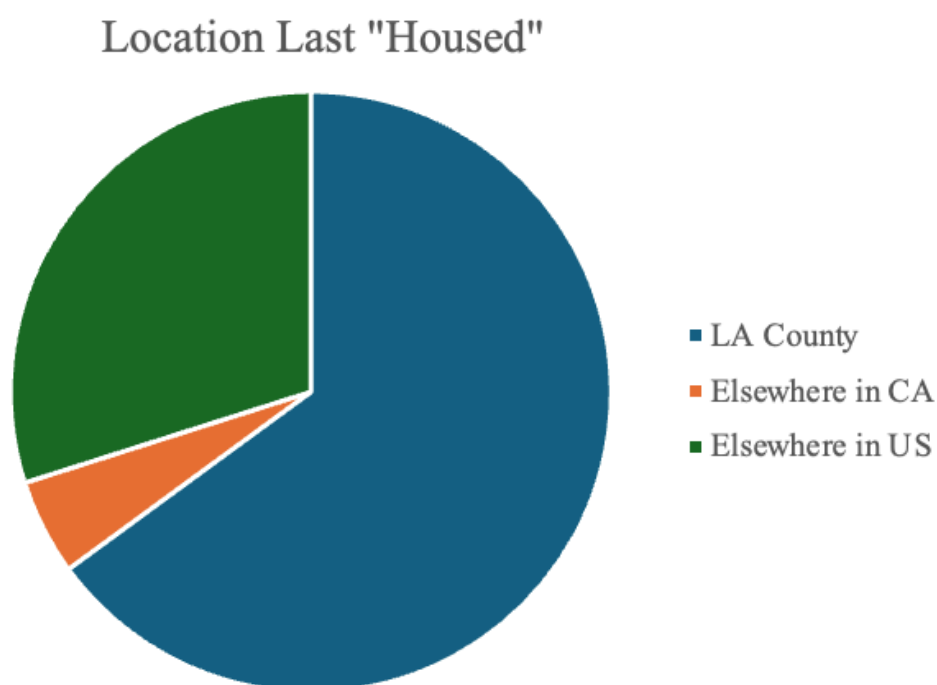
Over 40% of respondents’ last time living in a house, apartment or institutional setting was more than five years ago, while 20% had lived in one of these settings within the past year (see figure 8). While this question isn’t quite the same as asking when one became homeless, its indirectness enabled our survey to avoid the ascription of “homeless” while still asking for similar information. And while we don’t claim that all of our survey participants are homeless just because they live in a vehicle parked in public, it is nonetheless worth stressing that many haven’t lived in conventional housing for years.

Figure 8



When asked about the location where they last lived in an apartment, house or institutional setting (i.e., when they were last conventionally housed), 70% listed a location in California and 65% a location in LA County specifically. While this figure is lower than that found by the California Statewide Study of People Experiencing Homelessness¹, which found that nine out of ten participants lost their last housing in California and 75% in the same county that they’re currently homeless, that’s likely due to both differences in how the questions were asked and the specific experiences of vehicle residents in West LA versus the experiences of homeless people in California as a whole. The West LA neighborhood of Venice, for example, has long been a counterculture destination, including for people with unconventional living situations (e.g., “van life”). It’s of course ironic that the very countercultural forms of living that made Venice famous and ripe for gentrification are now at risk of disappearing due to both unaffordability and intolerance.

Figure 9

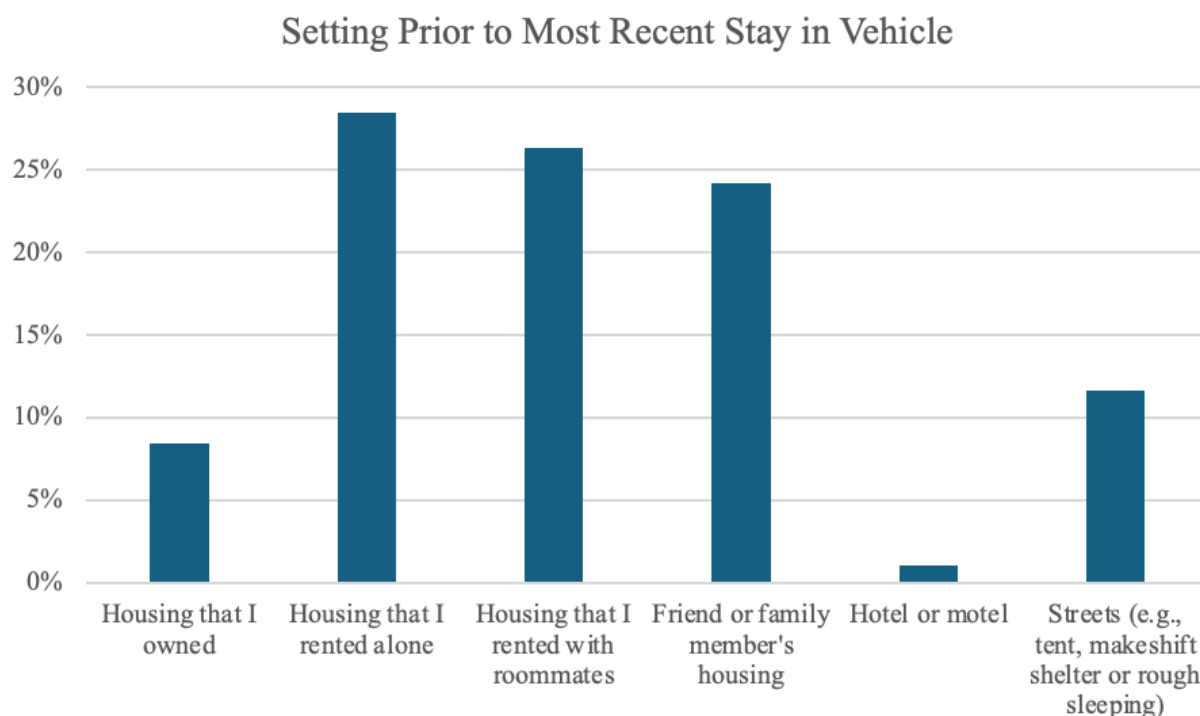


For most vehicle residents surveyed, they lived in an apartment or house prior to moving into a vehicle (see figure 10). For many, this was housing that they rented alone (28%) or with roommates (26%), and some even owned their housing (8%). Nearly one-quarter of vehicle residents moved from a friend or family member’s housing into a vehicle, suggesting a connection to “doubled-up” housing or homelessness in which the

¹ See Kushel, Margot, Tina Moore, Jennafer Birkmeyer, Zena Dhatt, Michael Duke, Kelly Ray Knight, and Kara Young Pounder. 2023. *Toward a New Understanding: The California Statewide Study of People Experiencing Homelessness*. UCSF Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative. <https://homelessness.ucsf.edu/our-impact/studies/california-statewide-study-people-experiencing-homelessness>.

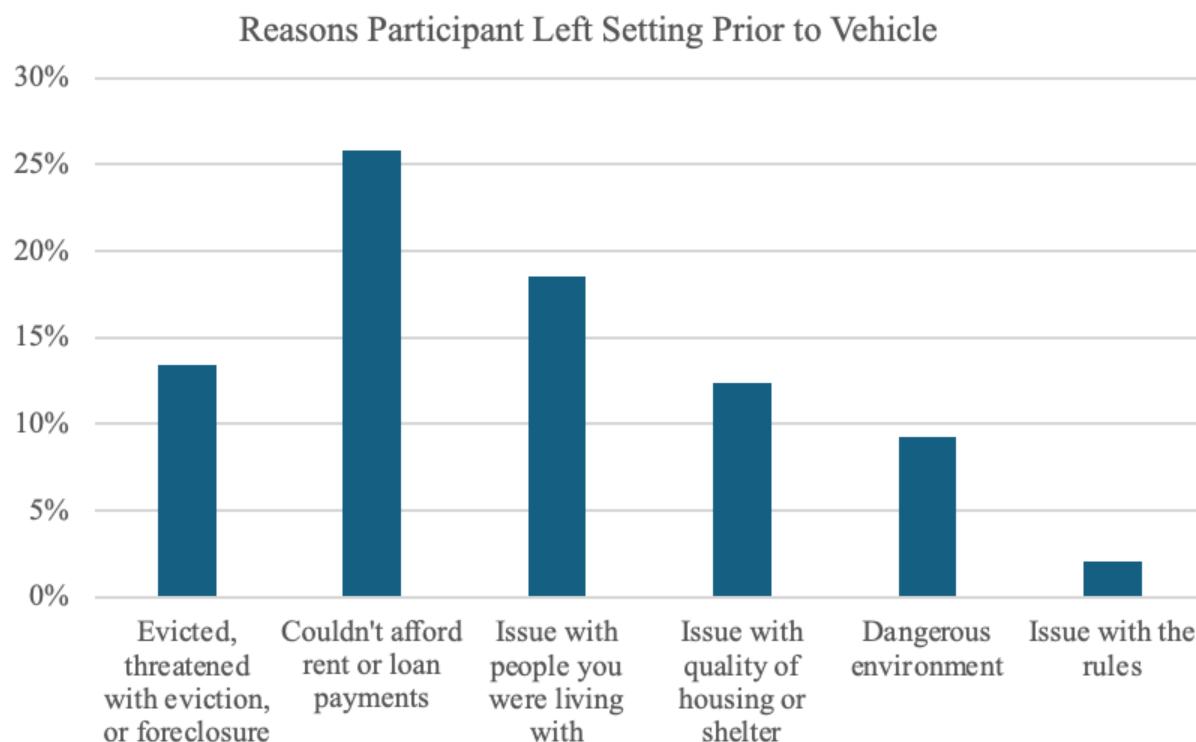
vehicle might be a relief valve of sorts for overcrowding. For 12% of vehicle residents who lived on the streets prior to their most recent move into a vehicle, the vehicle might very well have been a step up. Considering that 58% of vehicle residents surveyed had at some point stayed on the streets or in congregate shelter, it appears that many were using the vehicle as a personal safety net of sorts to catch them from falling further or back into homelessness.

Figure 10



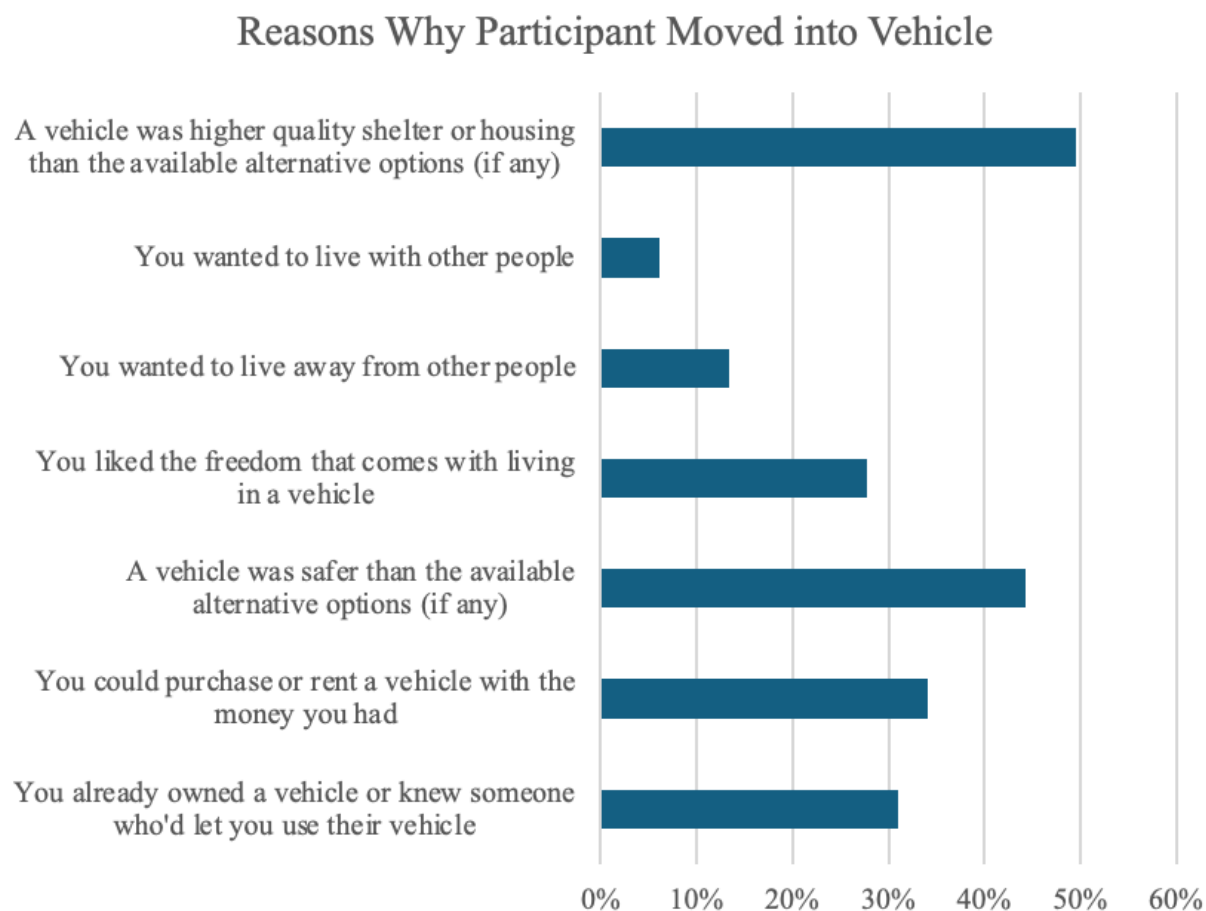
As shown in figure 11, the most popular reasons that vehicle residents left the setting they were living in prior to the vehicle were issues with affordability (26%), followed by issues with people they were living with (19%), eviction or foreclosure (13%), quality of shelter or housing (12%), and dangerous environment (9%). These reasons vary by prior housing/shelter type, of course, with nearly half (48%) of those who previously rented housing alone listing inability to afford rent as a contributing factor to leaving, compared with 32% for those who previously rented housing with roommates, who were just as likely to note issues with the people they were living with as a reason for leaving. One limitation of this question is that we didn't ask about possible underlying reasons that could contribute to proximate causes to leaving, but many participants listed these anyway under the open-ended “other” option, including: job loss, cut SSI, divorce, overcrowding, house fire, incarceration, and mental illness, among other reasons. Considering that one's pathway into vehicle residency may begin much earlier than the prior setting, future research should seek to examine pathways more deeply, ideally through interviews that can do justice to the specificities and complexity of vehicle residents' stories.

Figure 11



Finally, we asked each participant why they moved into a vehicle (see figure 12). The two most popular answers were that a vehicle was “higher quality shelter or housing” (49%) or “safer” (44%) than the available alternative options (if any). These answers are notable in light of the rationales often used by city and county authorities to dispossess vehicle residents of their dwellings, deeming them unsafe or unhealthy with residents better off in a shelter or housing program. Those vehicle residents who moved into a vehicle because of associated “freedom” (28%) were just as likely as those who didn’t to also select “safety” as a reason. While for many the choice to move into a vehicle came down to affordability (34%) or availability (31%), these other factors (e.g., quality, safety and freedom) are further testament to the importance of using asset-based framings when researching vehicle dwellings, as advocated by Dr. Graham Pruss of the National Vehicle Residency Collective. This is not to say that vehicle dwellings don’t come with their own challenges and problems; rather, it’s to say that they also present certain opportunities for their inhabitants that must be understood to create effective policy. Otherwise, government actors risk doubling down on cruel and ineffective strategies, like the targeted ticketing and tows and associated forms of harassment we turn to in our next section. First, however, we present an example of the push and pull factors to vehicle dwelling, in Redd’s story below.

Figure 12



Falling Back into Vehicle Dwelling **by Pat Raphael**

While he's had his ups and downs, Redd is on the whole a Venice housing success story. To hear his account of his days sleeping on the sidewalk, the boardwalk, and sometimes even jail (when he was drinking) is to feel like you're hearing tales of a different person than the one standing in front of you. But Redd always had a talented eye for art, which he could get by on through selling his creations to tourists visiting Venice.

Then one day, Redd got a job on the boardwalk and sobered up. Now he talks about how he's not had a drink for years, though he's never been to an AA meeting. His job on the boardwalk allowed Redd to save up and get a vehicle to live in. He'd work five days per week at his job and then continued selling his art on the boardwalk on weekends.

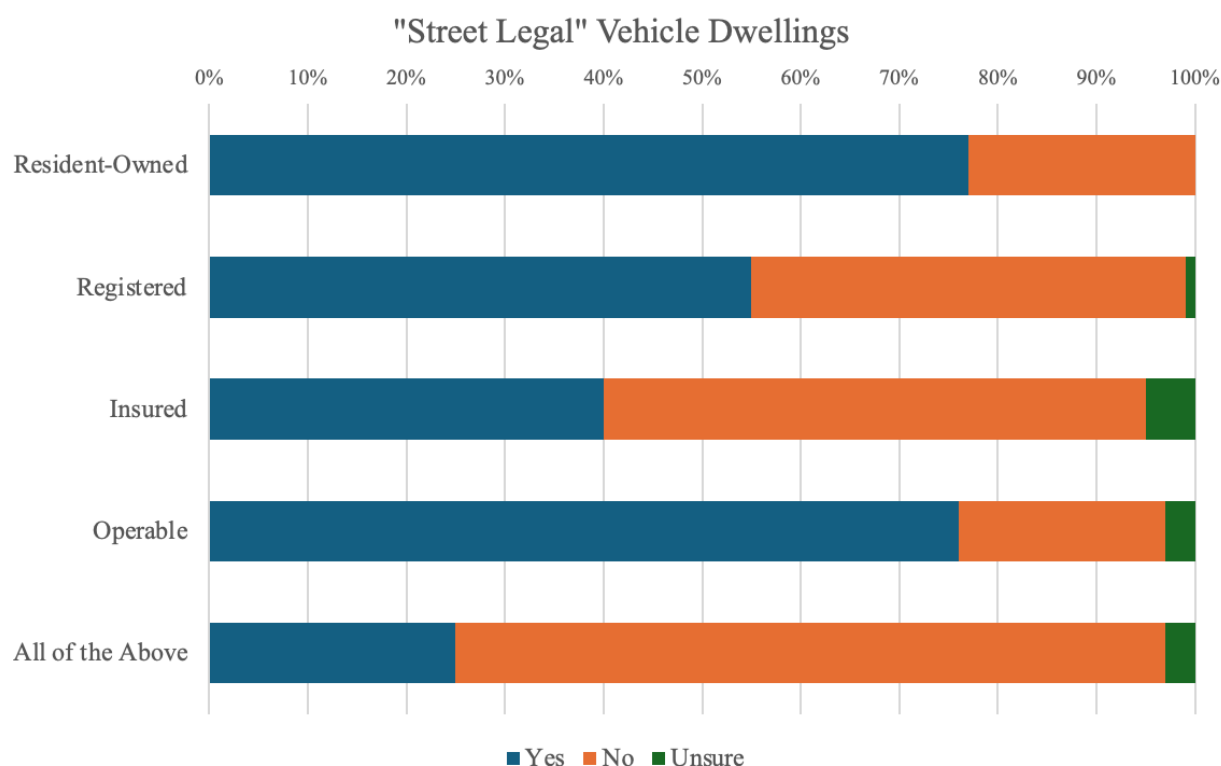
After some years, he met a lady in 2020 who owned a nice one-unit backhouse sitting empty, which she offered to rent to him for \$2,000/month, utilities and internet included. It's such a nice unit, steps away from the beach, how could he not take her up on the offer? When we'd walk together to the boardwalk, he'd point out how he used to sleep on this sidewalk or next to that fence, as if to remind himself of how far he'd come.

If only life would just freeze when everything is going right. A few months ago, Redd's landlord gave notice that she needed the unit for her sister to move in to. She offered him another unit in the same backyard for \$300 less per month, but when he visited it was so tiny that the math didn't add up. Rather, he decided his best option would be to buy a camper van, with a gym membership to make use of the bathroom. He still has his job and his artwork, so he plans to save up while he's living in the van until he can find a comparable unit to the one he'll soon lose. Redd isn't about to let the housing market push him out of Venice; as a self-fashioned rugged individualist, he's here to stay!

TARGETED TICKETS AND TOWS

While the aesthetics of vehicle dwellings occupy the public imagination, it is the vehicle condition among other conditions that ultimately determines whether or not someone’s dwelling is “street legal.” To be street legal, one’s vehicle dwelling must be operable, insured, registered and possess proof of ownership. But only 25% of our survey participants lived in vehicle dwellings that were street legal (see figure 13), opening most up to risk of citation and impoundment, often for lapsed registration or inoperability during a targeted street closure. While insurance is a requirement for registration, some vehicle residents can’t afford to continue paying insurance after their vehicle is registered, leading to a lower rate of insurance (40%) than registration (55%). And while participant ownership rates were high (77%), saying one owns the vehicle and actually having the title is the difference between being able to get one’s vehicle out of impoundment or not. In light of these legal and financial obstacles, operability (76%) becomes increasingly important as a way to stay mobile and avoid citations and impoundment.

Figure 13



As an example of these dynamics, one survey participant was frustrated that LADOT officers had cited his RV for lapsed registration three times in two weeks, which prevented him from registering it when he finally got the money together, as he’d first have to pay off more than \$500 in ticket debt. While his goal was to make his RV “legal” so he wouldn’t be further ticketed, LADOT practices put him further away from that goal

and undermined his trust in the government, who he accused of operating in “bad faith” to take his home. The end result was that he was “hiding in the RV and not doing the job search,” so that he could move his vehicle at a moment’s notice should parking enforcement show up¹. Impoundment would push him literally onto the streets and make him dependent on homeless services, hindering his goal of “independence.” This is because impoundment would virtually guarantee he’d never see his RV again: were his vehicle to be impounded, he’d not only have to pay impound and storage fees to get it out but also due tickets and registration. This vicious cycle of debt and dispossession for minor reasons isn’t unique to vehicle residents, as it disproportionately impacts poor and working-class people generally and makes up a substantial portion of impounded vehicles. For example, a 2019 report found that over one-quarter of tows in California are conducted for unpaid parking tickets, lapsed registration or being parked in one place for over 72 hours, earning these tows the moniker “poverty tows”².

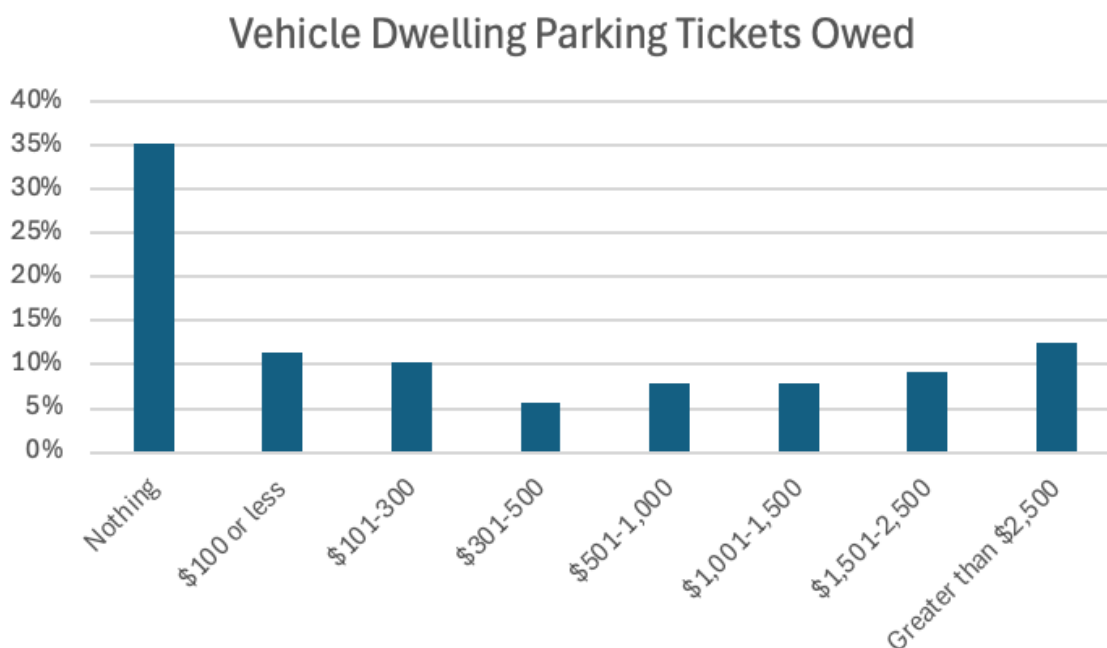
Most vehicle residents surveyed owed some amount of parking tickets (see figure 14), from one or two tickets to collections of tickets that with late fees had ballooned to thousands of dollars in debt. While Los Angeles Department of Transportation’s Community Assistance Parking Program (CAPP) provides parking ticket forgiveness for unhoused individuals in exchange for community service, only 6% of vehicle residents had ever participated in the program. For many, this was due to issues with program access, from ignorance of the program’s existence to the requirement that one have access to a phone in order to sign up. While some perhaps found the idea of performing community service unappealing (especially if they felt they’d been wronged), those who had participated in the program spoke positively of that part of the experience. But even if one could get registered for CAPP, the program only covers tickets issued by the City of Los Angeles and participants can only clear up to \$1,500 in fines over a 12-month period³. Meanwhile, 22% of vehicle residents surveyed had more than \$1,500 in parking ticket debt on their primary vehicle alone. Despite these issues, our experiences with signing people up for CAPP as part of Venice Justice Committee’s regular advocacy work leave us hopeful that programmatic expansion of parking ticket forgiveness and assistance to make one’s vehicle dwelling “street legal” could supplant counterproductive ticketing and towing practices.

¹ While parking enforcement in California generally must give notice ahead of vehicle impoundment, there are conditions under which impoundment may proceed immediately without notice, such as if registration is lapsed for more than six months or the vehicle presents a hazard to other traffic (California Vehicle Code 22651). https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?sectionNum=22651&lawCode=VEH.

² For more information on “poverty tows,” please see the 2019 report, *Towed Into Debt: How Towing Practices in California Punish Poor People*. Western Center on Law & Poverty. <https://wclp.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/TowedIntoDebt.Report.pdf>.

³ For more information on LADOT’s Community Assistance Parking Program (CAPP), please see: <https://ladotparking.org/operations-support/capp-info/>.

Figure 14



Beyond ticketing, the experience of towing was common among vehicle residents we surveyed. Nearly half (48%) lost a vehicle dwelling to towing at some point in their lives, and 15% experienced their vehicle dwelling’s impoundment within the past year alone. Three of those people weren’t able to get it back and are now living on the streets without a vehicle for shelter. Given the accelerated pace of towing practices across much of Los Angeles⁴, including within Council District 11 under Traci Park⁵, it’s plausible that these numbers have increased since the time of our survey. For example, we surveyed an elderly disabled man living in an RV next to a park in February 2024, only to then witness his RV’s impoundment one month later during one of the city’s vehicle dwelling operations, recounted in the story below.

⁴ Compared to over the Covid-19 pandemic when nearly all vehicle dwelling impounds were paused for public health reasons, there were 428 vehicle dwelling operations organized from May 2022 through August 2024, with 3,376 vehicle dwellings assessed for intervention, 1,396 parking citations issued, 795 vehicles impounded, and only 242 people housed. And these numbers are only for vehicle dwelling operations organized through the Office of the City Administrative Officer, not including regular ticketing and impounds. Source: Office of the City Administrative Officer. 2024. *Homeless Emergency Declaration – 2024-25 First Quarterly Report* (Council File No. 23-0652). https://clkrep.lacity.org/online/docs/2023/23-0652-s5_rpt_cao_9-12-24.pdf.

⁵ In a November 2024 email newsletter, Councilmember Park advertised that “for the first time in a decade, we are towing problematic RVs... we’ve conducted over 80 vehicle dwelling operations this year, resulting in the removal of hundreds of RVs from our streets.”

RV Tow Story (One of Too Many) **by Peggy Lee Kennedy**

Thanks to a local journalist, we had the schedule for that day's CARE+ operations (i.e., Comprehensive Cleaning and Rapid Engagement), a citywide sanitation program to clean up homeless camps that also involves law enforcement, homeless outreach and other government entities. Known as "sweeps," these operations are used to dispossess and displace unhoused people from public space, and may also target vehicle residents with towing. One of the locations on that day's list was a narrow median park that had recently been the site of one of Mayor Bass' Inside Safe operations, but the remaining RVs were still a source of complaints from at least a few neighboring homeowners.

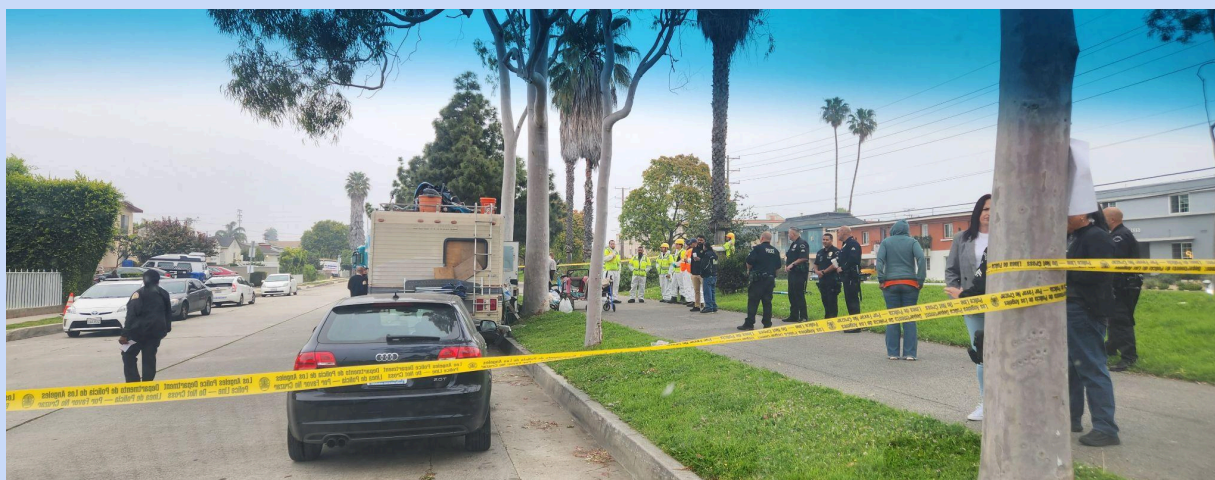
When I arrived at the park, I noticed the full Sanitation crew, LAPD, LA Department of Transportation, and Council District 11 staff congregated in a part of the park where there were no unhoused people nor RVs. But on the other end of the park, I noticed a lone Class C RV, so I drove up to park behind them and let them know there was a tow operation coming.

The RV resident was an elderly man with obvious physical disability and a dog companion. He didn't know about the tow operation coming his way, possibly due to Kyphosis or a similar condition that causes one to be bent over; he had to lean over sideways to see the red-and-white "Tow-Away Temporary No Parking" sign I pointed out to him. He said the RV couldn't move and his battery was stolen. Given the likelihood his RV would be impounded, I urged him to get his most important belongings gathered and we talked about him getting a hotel room. He had a social worker with St. Joseph Center, and while he didn't have a phone to reach them he at least had their business card.



I started calling his case worker, who was not at work. I'm not even sure they were still working there, given issues with high turnover among homeless services staff, but luckily their supervisor answered the phone. I told her the situation and asked for a hotel room for the elderly man, who was busy collecting his belongings. The supervisor asked if I could take the man's dog companion, which I would have loved to do (super sweet pup), but this was his companion and she was not leaving him nor vice versa. Over multiple calls, we hashed out some of the logistics, but the hotel room still wasn't secured.

Eventually, the operation made its way to the elderly man's RV and two Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) outreach staff showed up, apparently independent of the operation or just late. They all mostly stood around and the LAPD cordoned off the RV, the man and his dog with yellow caution tape. The Council District 11 homeless outreach staff never talked to the man, as far as I could see, instead hanging out with other government employees like it was a coffee hour.



After a Transportation officer told me to leave or get towed, one of the LAHSA workers told me they had it “under control now.” Honestly, if anyone had this situation under control, I wouldn't be warning this disabled senior of an impending tow operation nor calling St. Joseph Center to insist he get a hotel room, lest he be made street homeless.

I drove around the block, parked, and walked back. After being pumped for septic, the man's RV was loaded onto the Bruffy's tow truck and the Council District 11 homeless outreach staff took a picture of it, to be used as one of the before/after photos that Councilmember Traci Park likes to include in her email newsletter. These CARE+ operations are a waste of government resources, as evidenced by the twenty or so government employees mostly standing around and the expensive equipment they bring along with them (e.g., a full trash truck and a towed front loader, which wasn't even

used). All this effort and money to put an elderly disabled man and his dog onto the street, seemingly without a care.



I followed up later to find out whether the man and his dog were, in fact, put in a local hotel. Thankfully, they were. But I wonder what would have happened if I hadn't been there, and it's those sorts of questions and the ability to tell these stories that fuel my activism.

THE QUEST FOR PARKING STABILITY

“Do you know of any places we can park in case they make us move today?” We received this text from a survey participant living in an RV with their partner behind Home Depot on a street where vehicle residency had become increasingly contested. Long known as a spot where vehicle residents could park, including those displaced by “sweeps” at nearby locations like the Ballona Wetlands, the street had reached a tipping point of sorts as adjacent businesses and a private school complained of drug usage, garbage and other issues. These were issues that the RV residents we spoke with also complained about, but they recognized these issues as particular to certain people living on the street (e.g., in the case of disruptive drug use) and/or due to lacking infrastructure (e.g., in the case of garbage). Rather than address this complexity, local businesses (including Home Depot) took matters into their own hands and installed planter tubs where vehicle residents typically parked after a sweep one day. We documented them doing so and shared that documentation with the *Los Angeles Times*, whose story¹ about the tubs led to them being taken away, though no one was ever cited.

Figure 15: The street behind Home Depot prior to a sweep (photo credit: Sam Lutzker).



¹ Solis, Nathan. 2024. “Planters illegally bolted to an L.A. street to deter RV parking are gone. Who did it remains a mystery.” *Los Angeles Times*.
<https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2024-06-04/did-home-depot-workers-install-planters-on-an-l-a-street-to-deter-rv-parking>.

The story of the illegally installed Home Depot tubs, including the city’s muted response to vigilantism, reveals how difficult it can be for vehicle residents to find parking stability. In addition to ticketing and tows, they also must worry about who their neighbors are and nearby infrastructure (or lack thereof). We asked vehicle residents about their parking spots for these reasons, including how often they move, why they move, and where they move to. Among other things, we found that government actions and conflict with housed neighbors could lead to parking instability, making vehicle residents’ lives and service connections more difficult.

While some vehicle residents are able to find stable overnight parking spots, most have to alternate between spots (see figure 16). Some vehicle residents are constantly moving between overnight parking spots, with 25% moving on average at least once per week over the past month; 10% have moved at least seven times over the past month. Notably, these moves only account for overnight parking spots, which may be different than daytime parking spots given Los Angeles’ myriad parking regulations. And these moves are different from how someone with conventional housing changes parking spots for their transportation vehicle, as vehicle dwellings can be both larger and attract all types of attention. Even if one finds a stable parking spot for several months (see figure 17), there is no guarantee that spot will remain stable. And a move may then set off a series of moves until one finds temporary stability again, if ever.

Figure 16

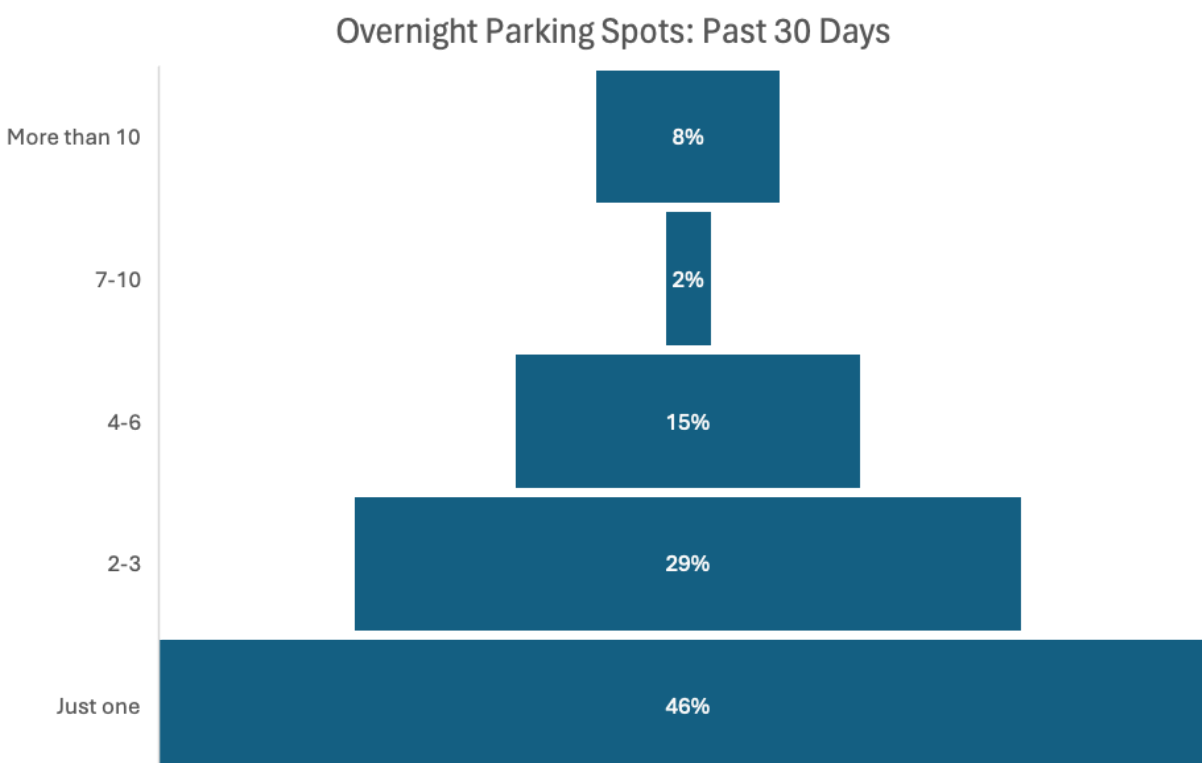
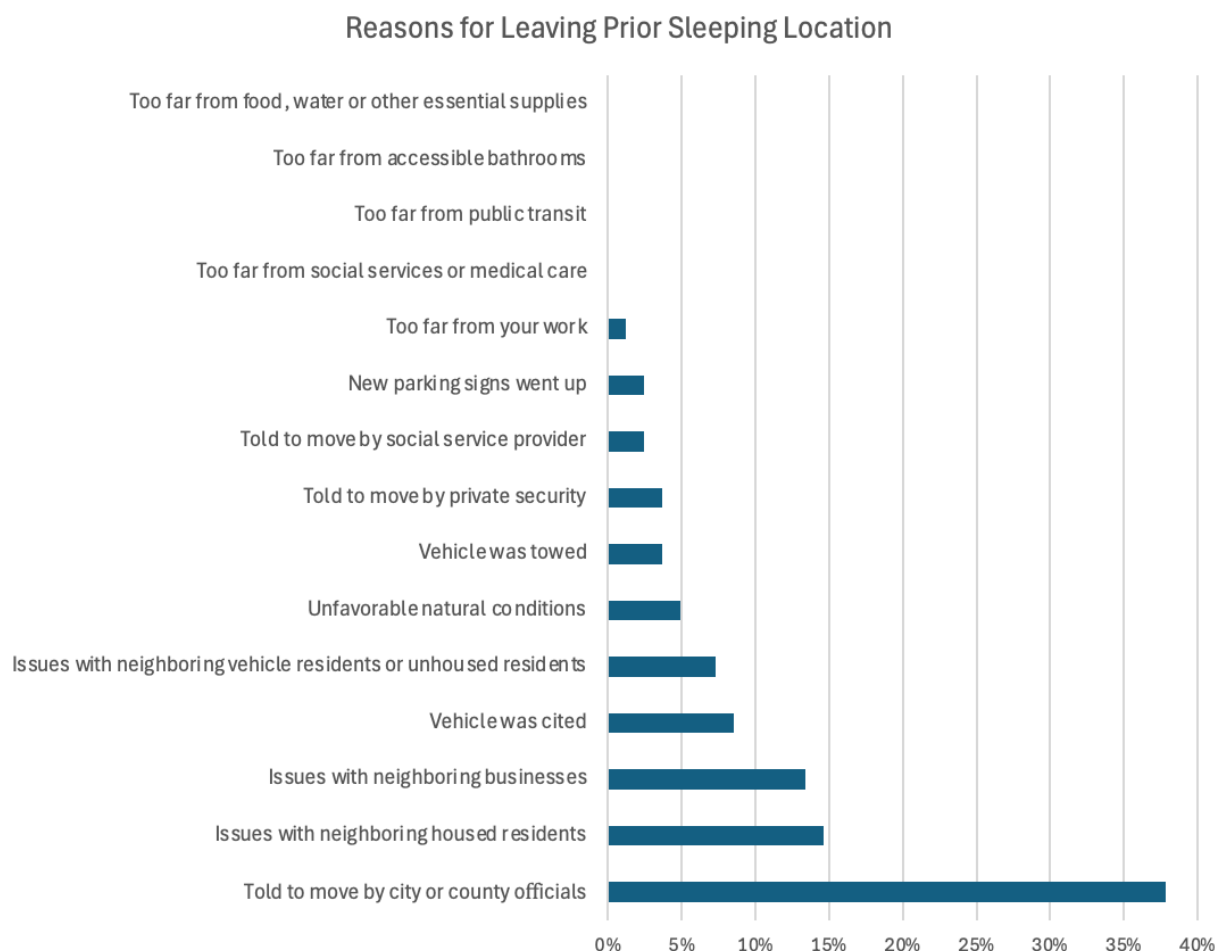


Figure 17



When asked why they'd left their prior sleeping location and given a list of common reasons (see figure 18), the number one reason a vehicle resident left was because they were “told to move by city or county officials” (38%), followed by issues with neighboring housed residents (15%) or businesses (13%), citations (9%), issues with neighboring vehicle or unhoused residents (7%), and so forth. In other words, these are some of the common push factors for why vehicle residents change spots. We also found during the course of our survey outreach that some vehicle residents voluntarily alternate between a few overnight parking spots, in large part to avoid harassment; it's unclear how these sort of preemptive moves would be classified under this question so future studies should seek to differentiate the extent to which moves are forced, voluntary, or some combination. It is also worth questioning how voluntary any move truly is when one's impetus for moving is avoiding harassment. It would appear that most vehicle residents are moving spots not because they've found a better spot but because they've been forced to move.

Figure 18



In response to their forced mobility, vehicle residents seek out new locations for their positive qualities and lack of negative qualities (see figure 19). In particular, they seek to find “favorable natural conditions” (40%), “accessible food, water or other essential supplies” (33%), and limited or no issues with parking enforcement (32%), neighboring businesses (29%), or housed residents (25%). Avoiding these sorts of negative social relations with neighbors, in fact, were more common reasons for settling on a new sleeping location than ostensibly positive social relations with people already living there (24%). Given that over three-quarters of vehicle residents surveyed reported experiencing harassment within the past month because they live in a vehicle (see figure 20), with the second most common source of that harassment after police (50%) being housed neighbors (37%), it makes sense that many of the places we visited to survey vehicle residents were in non-residential areas. While these areas can have unfavorable natural conditions, which put vehicle residents at risk of exposure to heat and other weather-related events like flooding, their presence is more often tolerated than in residential areas.

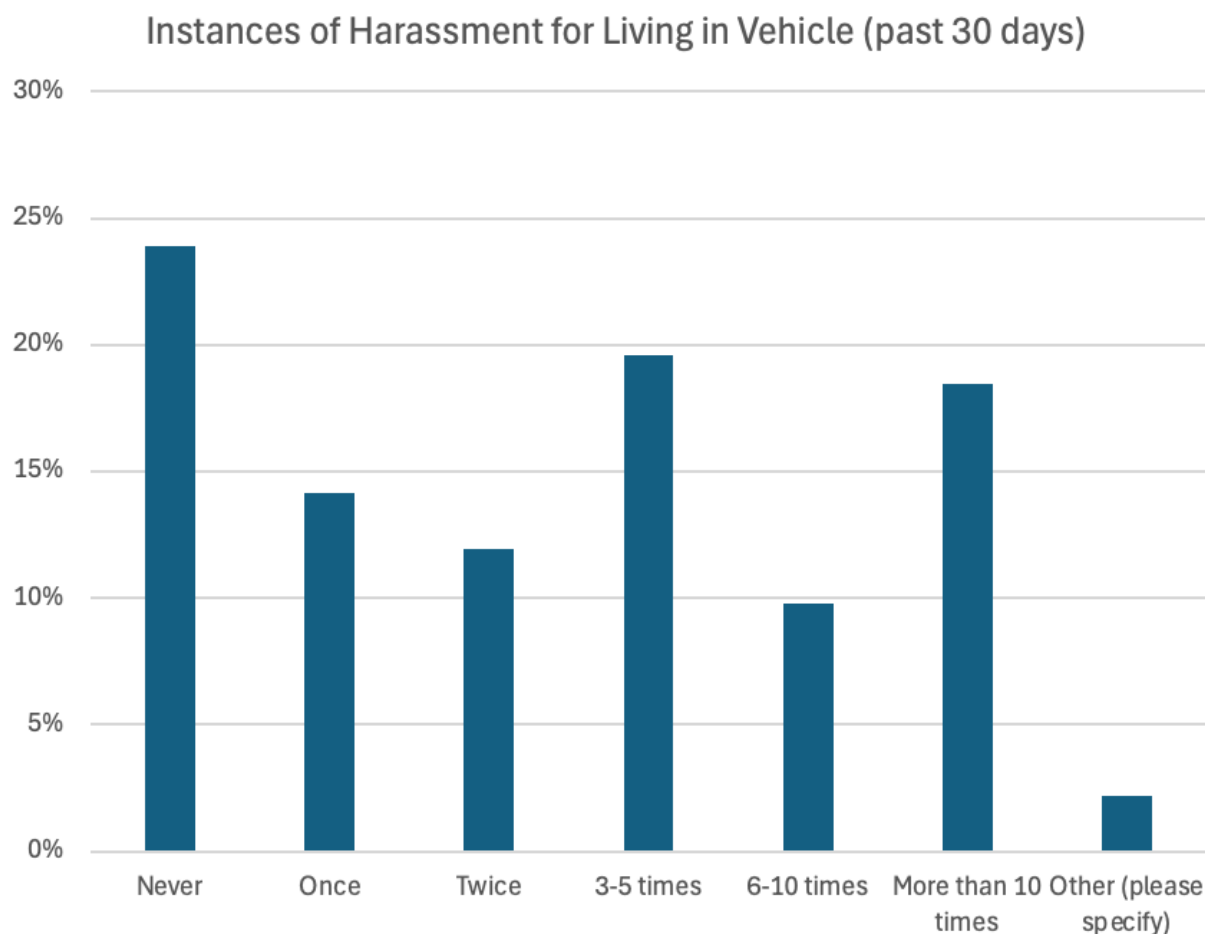
Figure 19



In spite of popular depictions to the contrary, many vehicle residents explicitly seek to avoid conflict wherever they park. While they could park on those residential side streets that don’t yet have restrictive parking regulations aimed at vehicle residents (e.g., oversized vehicle ordinances²), some vehicle residents mentioned they don’t want to for fear of angering housed residents and being harassed. Unfortunately, instances of harassment that explicitly targeted vehicle residents because they live in a vehicle were common across our survey sample (see figure 20).

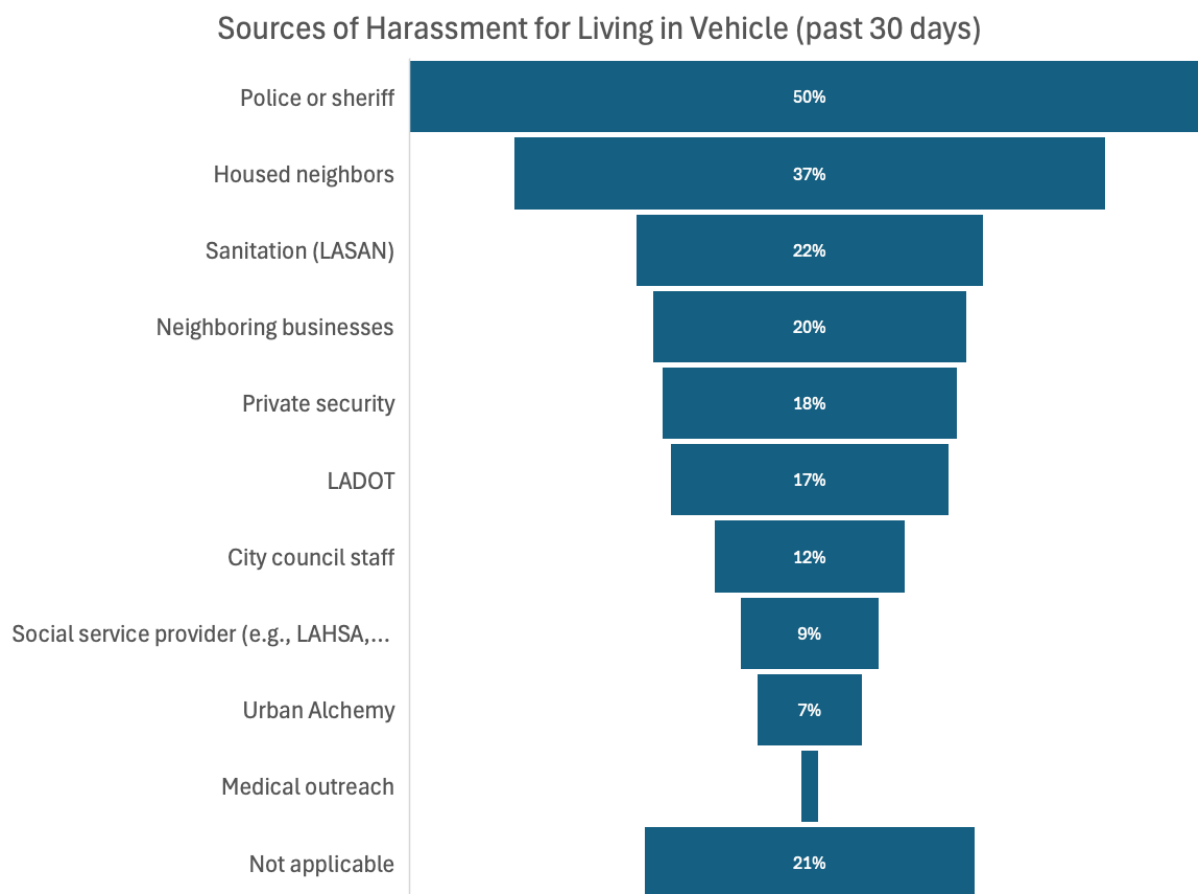
² Oversized vehicle ordinances typically forbid parking from 2-6AM for vehicles that are over 22 feet in length or over 7 feet in height. They are meant to ban RVs and some vans from overnight parking, thus impeding vehicle residents’ ability to find places to sleep.

Figure 20



This means that in addition to official parking regulations, there are unofficial parking rules that vehicle residents abide by, such as staying off streets with single-family homes and away from businesses protected by security groups like Ghost Town Security that use illegal practices of intimidation. For example, one participant was harassed by a Ghost Town Security employee to move from in front of a business, despite being legally parked there. Another participant received a rock through their RV's back window and anonymous notes asking them to move. Figure 21 shows the most common sources of harassment that vehicle residents faced, with half of vehicle residents surveyed experiencing harassment because they live in a vehicle from the police or sheriff within the past 30 days. Notably, harassment from housed neighbors (37%) was the second most common answer.

Figure 21



The possible return of policies like LA Municipal Code 85.02, which in its last iteration forbade using vehicles as overnight dwellings on residential streets and near parks and schools until it was allowed to sunset in 2020, would further shrink the possible places where vehicle residents can park. Many of the remaining areas to park would be in industrial zones and along major thoroughfares, exposing vehicle residents to not only weather-related events but also pollution. While vehicle dwellings provide an extra layer of protection from the exposures of tent-living or hard-sleeping, they are still vulnerable to heat, flooding, and automobile crashes (e.g., one survey participant lost a prior vehicle dwelling because a vehicle smashed into it when it was parked). As such, finding “favorable natural conditions” is a matter of life and death for vehicle residents. Nathan’s story below provides a sense of the stresses that come with vehicle living, many of them imposed or worsened by humans.

Proud to be a Peasant **by Nathan Clukey**

I was brought up in Maine where frugality and independence are highly regarded virtues. Boy Scouts was at its peak and it was awesome. And 70s TV was full of admirable, underdog characters that suffered poverty on account of their unwavering personal convictions: Little House, Kung Fu, Good Times, The Hulk. I really wanted to be like Caine in Kung Fu, and as a result I vowed to never make an unethical decision because of money or desire. I always embraced the hardship that came with those choices, though many were unexpected and more painful than I could possibly have known.

But I always took care of myself, and generally avoided renting except while in a relationship; rather, I defaulted to more rewarding choices. A tent, a backpack and a bike were always there for me. They provided freedom in every way. I arrived in LA for the first time in 1998. I was broke, just passing through, but I had no idea LA was so beautiful; further, I could make a living doing the art that I love. That's exactly what happened and like a rocket my life took off here. I lived every alternative lifestyle I can think of: a 40-foot sailboat in the marina; a 1967 VW bus that I had to hide that I was sleeping in; a backyard tipi; a 5,000 square foot warehouse; and even a storage unit (twice). I worked in construction, restaurants, pre- and post-production, video game development, and even danced ballet semi-professionally for six years.

One of my proudest experiences was raising my son as a single dad. I had a successful dog-walking business that enabled me to focus on fatherhood. But dog-walking agencies slowly made it harder for independent contractors like me and then I broke my ankle onstage during a production of Sleeping Beauty. My body continued to wear down, and my hiring prospects and idealism with it. As an environmentalist who campaigned against fossil fuels, I'd always thought, "why would anyone want to live in an RV? The road is so noisy and dirty." But after my friend showed up one day with his step van (often called a bread or mail truck), "van-life" started to look different to me, and the idea of getting a schoolie and building it into a nice little home became more and more attractive.

So I found a step van just like my friend's, purchased it for \$10k, and within three weeks I made it as comfortable as living on a sailboat, with power, water and internet. Except, when I told people I lived on a sailboat, they'd go, "Ooooooh, nice!" They thought I was rich, even though the step van cost just as much as the sailboat. Whereas when I'm in the van, people think I'm part of the "homeless problem," a term I resent for how it frames my existence as something that needs to be solved. If there is a problem, it's

intolerance. Politicians choose to have compassion for “Mr. Real Estate Guy” because he thinks his investments will lose a few points due to the presence of the poor, resulting in laws that criminalize us, make our lives measurably harder and lead to premature death. And this all happens while they pretend to help us and care. It’s all very unethical.

It’s because of such laws and stigma that I don’t go around telling people I live in a van. I really have to keep it to myself, so I just say “I live near Olympic and Sawtelle” or something like that. Vehicle residents have been in Los Angeles the entire time I’ve lived here, and yet now we’re a “crisis?” And social media has just made the politicians’ rhetoric omnipresent, with anything low-income deemed an enemy of the good society. “Clean up the streets,” they say, but only out of “compassion,” of course. But crime, dishonesty, greed, mental illness, drug addiction and good ol’ making a big fucking mess know no economic boundaries; the poor folks who live outside are just visible.

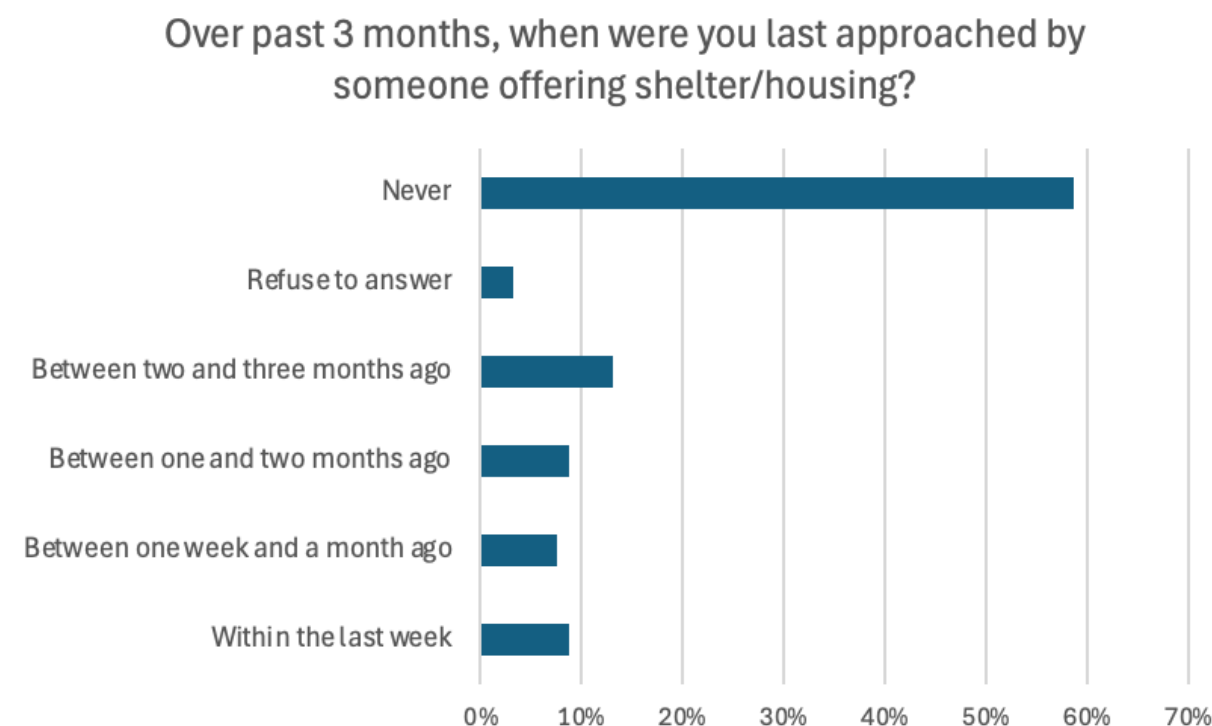
The step van really saved my butt during the pandemic, when so many lost work and their homes. In 2022 I tore the meniscus in my knee, meaning I couldn’t walk or work for a while. My van and savings allowed me to stay independent and near my family, friends and church. But now that I can’t do hard physical labor, I’m thinking about my retirement years. I’ve been in LA for 27 years, I have strong ties here, so I’d be sad if I was forced to leave.

I’m not complaining about my life; rather, I feel privileged to be healthy and living in a van enables me to see our society in an alternative way. I see that there are absolutely no arguments that merit anti-poverty laws like the ones that target vehicle residents and the unhoused. I see that artificial scarcity and environmental damage are due to unrestricted capitalism. And I see that appreciation and tolerance would help us all. If we embrace those qualities, maybe more people would just forget that they’re supposed to treat the poor like a problem to be solved. Maybe they’d realize they’re more like Caine or Bruce Banner, traveling from town to town, helping people when they can, and standing up to injustice with little thought for themselves. I can only hope.

INADEQUATE SERVICES AND HOUSING

For most vehicle residents surveyed (59%), they’d received no shelter or housing “offers” over the prior three months (see figure 22). 38% had received some form of offer, though calling most of these “offers” is an overly generous use of the term. Given what we found about these offers through our survey, it appears that generalized offers of housing or shelter are sometimes used as catalysts to conversation rather than as genuine offers. Given all of the talk of offers with little follow-through, we argue that narratives of vehicle residents’ so-called “service resistance” ought to be recast as narratives of their logical “service hesitancy” amid a risky environment of insufficient housing resources, disorganized outreach, and politically driven operation planning.

Figure 22

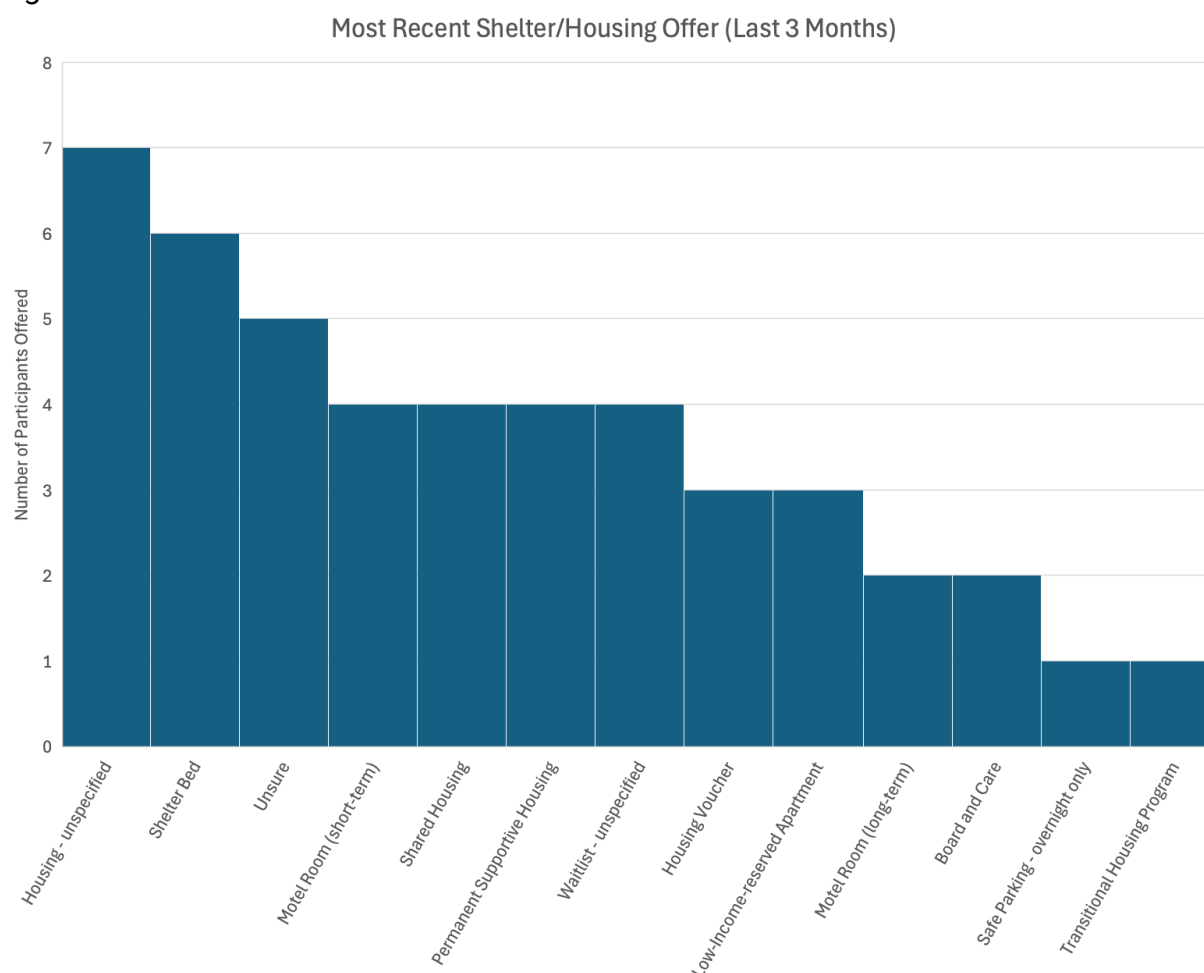


For the minority of vehicle residents who were offered some form of housing or shelter over the past three months, the most common offers were for unspecified “housing,” followed by a shelter bed, a motel voucher, shared housing, permanent supportive housing, an unspecified “waitlist,” and so on (see figure 23¹). We believe unspecified offers are ripe for participant misunderstanding and abuse by authorities,

¹ Because sometimes multiple shelter/housing program options are discussed in an “offer,” we allowed participants to check more than one program type for this question.

who rely on them rhetorically to pave the way for sweeps which temporarily resolve visible homelessness. While it is understandable that outreach workers would probe interest in housing as a conversation-starter, as we heard from multiple participants and even witnessed ourselves during one survey outing, this has the unintended consequence of producing client expectations amid tight housing supply. We also expect there are similar miscommunications around waitlists, as there is no centralized housing waitlist; rather, there are a number of lists that vary by program, locality and qualifications. For example, the “community queue” for permanent supportive housing requires clients to be fully document ready and in regular communication with their service provider, lest they be removed from the waitlist.

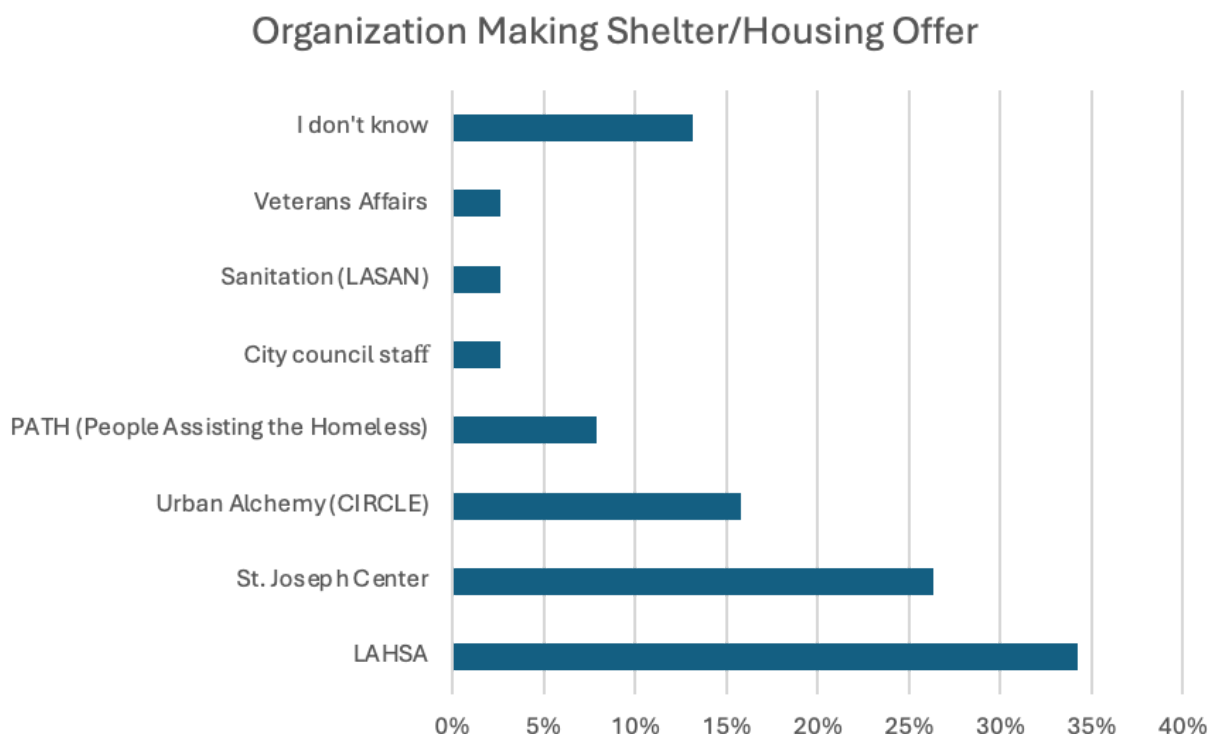
Figure 23



For the organizations making these offers (see figure 24), they represent the typical homeless outreach service providers in Service Planning Area 5 (i.e., “West LA”): the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA), St. Joseph Center, Urban Alchemy’s Crisis and Incident Response through Community-Led Engagement (i.e., CIRCLE, which is active in Venice), and People Assisting the Homeless (PATH). Notably,

a significant portion of those we surveyed didn’t know which organization had spoken to them about housing or shelter, though with some probing we were able to identify the organization based on descriptions of their uniform. The transient nature of relationships with outreach workers underscores both high turnover among over-burdened staff and difficulty following through on relationships amid ongoing displacement and lacking offers.

Figure 24

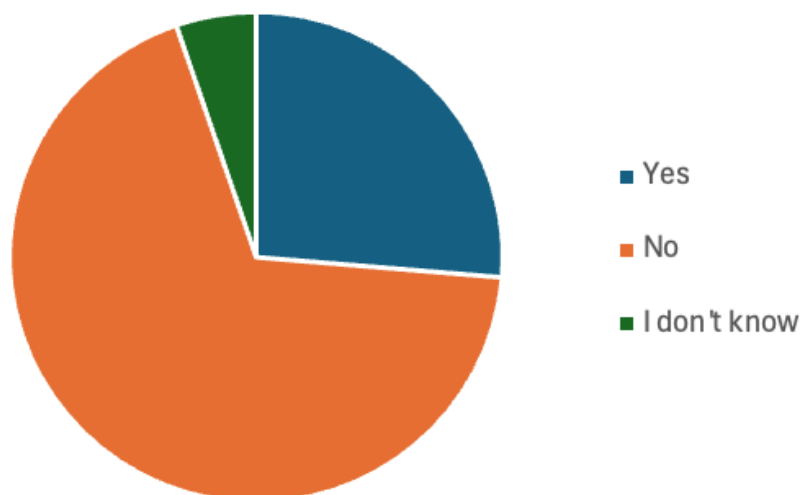


While housing or shelter offers have long been doled out verbally and not in writing, as was the case with 82% of survey respondents who had received some offer over the past three months, these offers are sometimes predicated on giving up one’s vehicle dwelling for impoundment. As seen in figure 25, over one-quarter of vehicle residents who’d received an offer over the past three months experienced this quid pro quo, and we’d expect this portion to increase were more of these offers to materialize beyond initial conversation. For example, one survey participant was asked to register their vehicle as “junk” with the DMV ahead of an Inside Safe operation to move them into a motel room. The City and County emphasize not just housing vehicle residents but making sure their vehicle dwellings are both impounded and destroyed. This strategy appears to be the response to a public backlash to relaxed enforcement of parking restrictions over the Covid-19 pandemic, during which more people found

shelter in vehicles, as well as the realization that at least some of these impounded vehicle dwellings were making it back to the streets via police auction. Rather than recognize the recycling of vehicle dwellings as the informal market’s solution to housing market failures, however, government officials have derided “vanlords²” and sought to raise the maximum assessed value at which an impounded RV can be destroyed without a lien from \$500 to \$4,000³. Los Angeles city officials have also leased 25 California Department of Transportation lots to increase RV storage capacity to allow for more impoundments⁴. Given the rapidly shifting policy landscape around vehicle dwellings locally and statewide, our survey captured a moment in time when these policies were still in formation, including the rise of the quid pro quo housing offer in exchange for vehicle destruction. One member of our team with lived experience of living in a vehicle described this sort of setup as akin to a “trust fall” exercise albeit in real life and with one’s shelter/housing on the line.

Figure 25

Were you asked to give up your vehicle in exchange for shelter/housing?



² We are not supportive of vanlords, but find that they are an easy scapegoat for government officials. In the absence of affordable housing, we recognize that some vehicle residents will depend on vanlords for shelter or housing and that the alternative is often living on the streets. Further, good faith efforts to deal with vanlords would employ a tenants rights framework that is sorely lacking.

³ For more information on California State Assembly Bill 630 (AB 630), please see: <https://a54.asmdc.org/press-releases/20250408-assemblymember-mark-gonzalez-introduces-bill-address-rv-encampments-and>.

⁴ For more information on California State Assembly Bill 2525 (AB 2525), please see: <https://a51.asmdc.org/press-releases/20240522-assemblymember-zbur-mayor-bass-bill-house-angeleno-living-rvs-advances>.

Despite issues with these housing or shelter offers, most (61%) vehicle residents who received such an offer accepted it (see figure 26). While 16% declined the offer, 13% asked for more information and those who marked “other” either thought the offer wasn’t real or couldn’t satisfy requirements (e.g., missing necessary documentation or income requirements that were too high). Even for those who declined the offer, common reasons tended to be due to mismatched offers (e.g., being unable to continue living with one’s romantic partner), distrust of the person and/or organization making the offer (e.g., one participant wrote that the offer was “bull shit”), or preference for the vehicle dwelling (see figure 27). Given government officials’ rush to destroy RVs valued at or under \$4,000, without even a corresponding program of compensation, it’s clear there is somewhat of a disagreement between vehicle residents and government officials over the value (material and symbolic) of their vehicle dwellings. As one participant who declined the offer noted, they were already “happy and content,” though they also noted other reasons like lack of trust for their decision to decline.

Figure 26

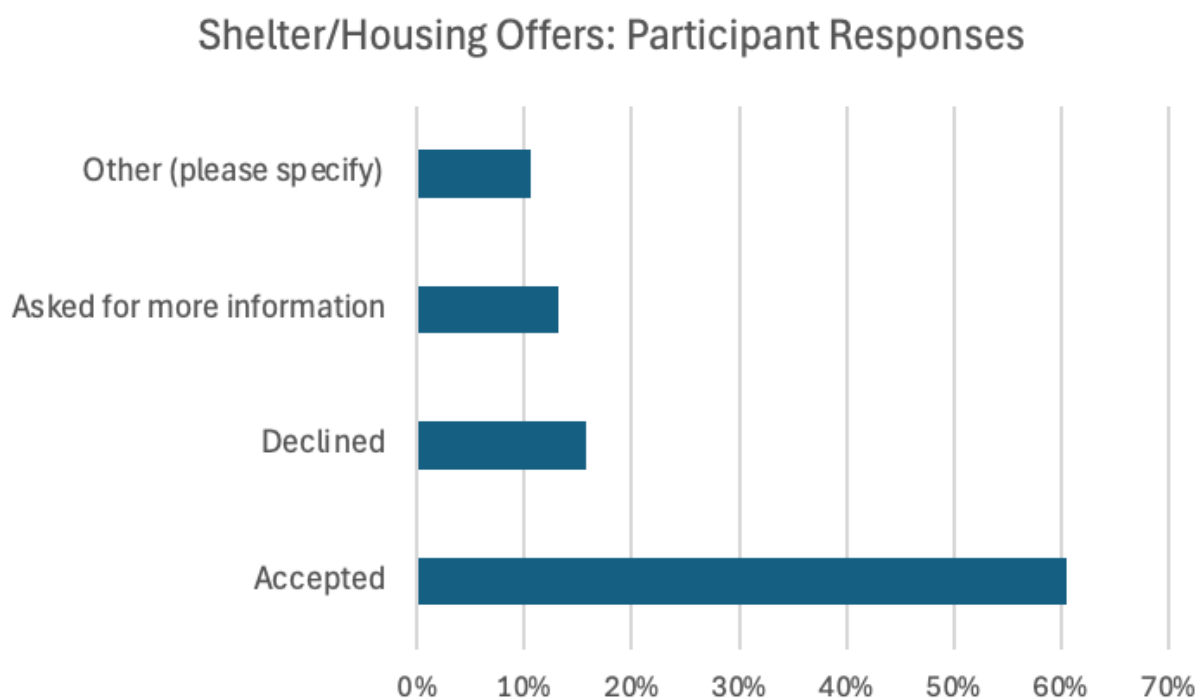
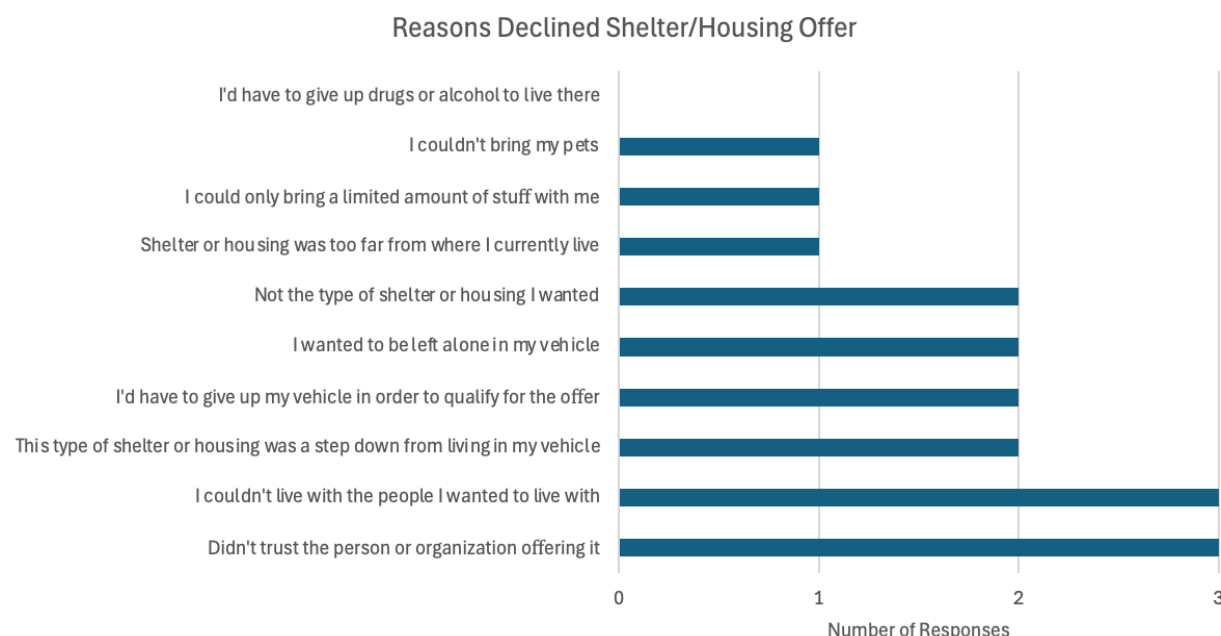


Figure 27



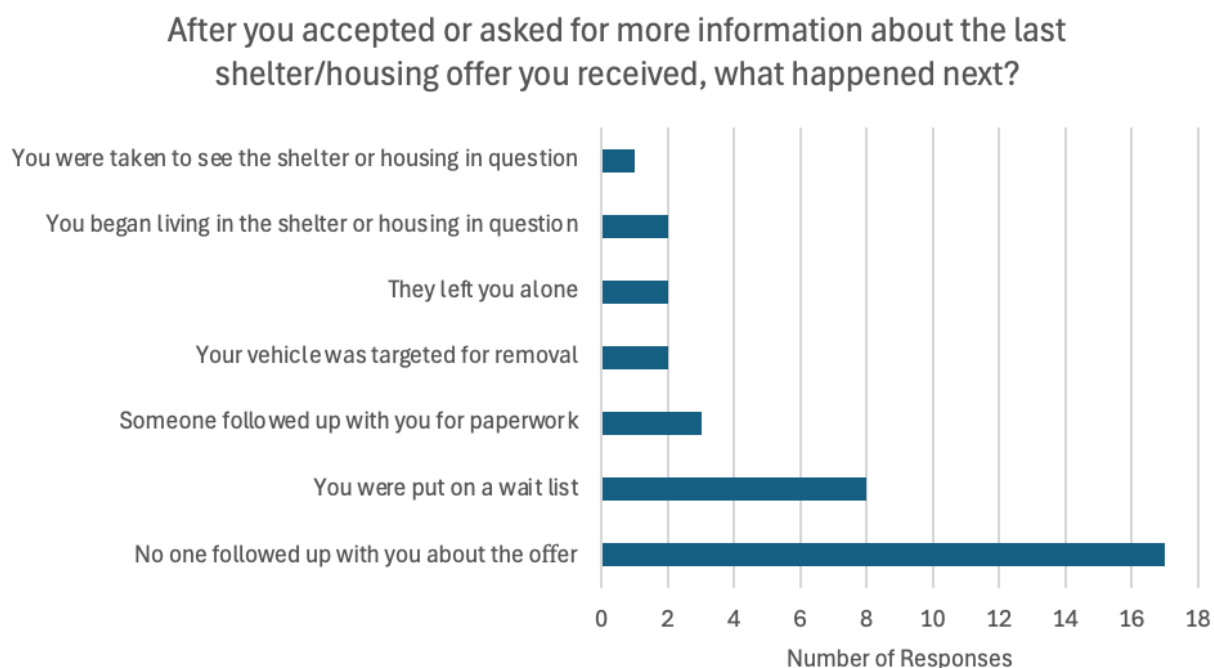
While it's possible that some of those 74% of vehicle residents who accepted the offer or asked for more information would later change their minds, or were bluffing in an effort to avoid negative comments of “service resistance” or the like on their record in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), we believe willingness to engage with an offer should at the very least be a step to further conversation. Unfortunately, in most cases that didn't happen. Figure 28 shows the most common series of events for those 28 vehicle residents who accepted or asked for more information about the shelter/housing offer presented to them: 61% of them shared that no one followed up with them about the offer, 29% were put on a waitlist, 11% were followed up with for paperwork, 11% were taken to see the shelter/housing in question or began living in it, and 7% even had their vehicle targeted for removal⁵. The lack of services follow-through to these vehicle residents' generally positive responses to housing and shelter offers can be interpreted as evidence of difficulty following up with a mobile population and/or the superficiality of these offers.

While it's possible some of these numbers may improve with time, we expect the opposite to be more likely true under current conditions. The rate of no follow-up was actually higher (80%) for offers made more than a month ago versus offers made within the past month (33%). Further, the rate of being put on a waitlist was 7% for offers made more than a month ago versus 58% for offers made within the past month. While 28 people who accepted or asked for more information about offers is too small of a

⁵ Residents were allowed to indicate more than one answer for this question so tallied percentages will exceed 100%.

sample to generalize from, we hypothesize that as time goes by without follow-up, vehicle residents come to distrust the waitlist they were promised and instead focus on the lack of follow-up as evidence of a superficial offer. The fact that only six of the 99 vehicle residents surveyed received multiple shelter/housing offers over the past three months demonstrates a patchwork strategy of services outreach that is woefully inadequate to meet social work best practices for building necessary trust across repeated interactions.

Figure 28



Despite the vagueness of many shelter/housing offers, vehicle residents have specific shelter/housing program experiences and preferences that can be a guide for policymakers thinking about where to invest (or not invest) limited resources. We read participants a list of common shelter/housing program types and asked them whether they’d ever participated and whether they would “choose to participate” if offered (i.e., “experiences” and “preferences” in figure 29); we also did this for common social service programs, except we only asked about experiences over the past year (see figure 30). In order to capture a variety of experiences and preferences, some listed program types are overlapping: for example, many of Los Angeles’ single room occupancy (SRO) buildings are run as permanent supportive housing, so we asked about both. When participants didn’t know a program by the name provided, we described the program to them. While our findings are limited in the sense that we can’t

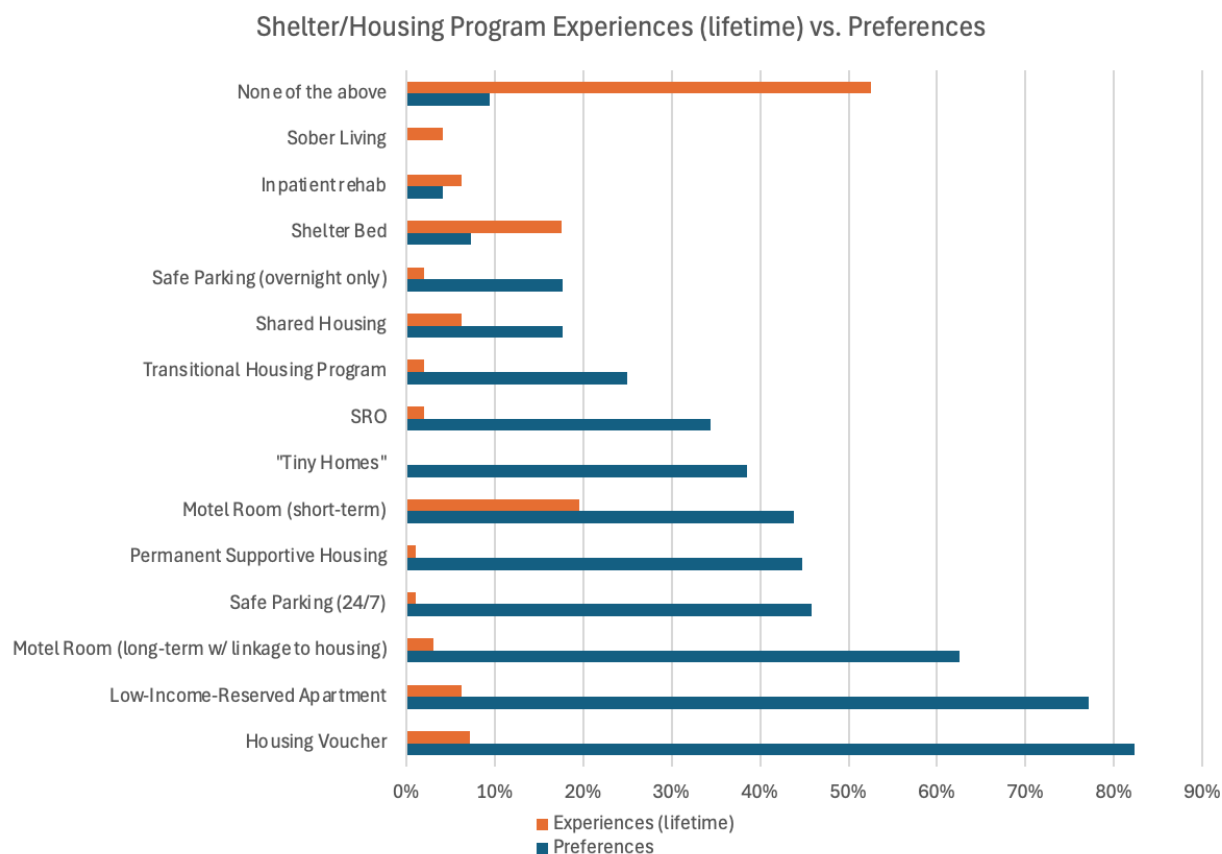
tell the strength of any one participant’s preference for a program relative to other programs they also selected, there are nonetheless clear patterns that emerge.

Housing voucher programs have the most widespread popularity, with 82% of surveyed vehicle residents reporting they’d choose to participate if offered. This is followed by low-income-reserved apartments (77%), long-term motel vouchers with linkages to housing (63%), safe parking that operates 24/7 (46%), permanent supportive housing (45%), short-term motel vouchers (44%), “tiny homes” (39%), single room occupancy buildings (34%), transitional housing programs (25%), shared housing (18%), overnight-only safe parking (18%), congregate shelter beds (7%), and inpatient rehab (4%)⁶. Notably, only 9% of participants expressed that they were interested in none of the above programs. Clearly, there is a preference for housing programs, especially those that come with the freedom of choosing where one lives (e.g., housing vouchers) and not having to abide by special rules (e.g., the relative popularity of low-income reserved apartments versus permanent supportive housing or transitional housing). But there is also a preference for some forms of what might be called interim housing: long-term motel vouchers with linkages to housing, 24/7 safe parking, and “tiny homes.” And some programs appear to be relatively unpopular due to congregate living (e.g., shelter beds and shared housing) and/or required mobility (e.g., overnight-only safe parking). While these results give a sense of popularity, that popularity is largely based on impressions rather than personal experiences, as most participants had never participated in any one of these programs with the exception of shelter beds and short-term motel vouchers. They may find that while the idea of a long-term motel room with linkage to housing sounds nice, the devil is in the details (e.g., high rates of return to homeless that have plagued Mayor Karen Bass’ Inside Safe program⁷).

⁶ While we tried to include a variety of shelter/housing program types, we didn’t include “sober living,” which was instead written in; had we explicitly asked about sober living, we’d have likely received a slightly higher percentage of answers for it.

⁷ For tracking of housing placements and exits from Inside Safe, please see: <https://homelessdashboard.lacontroller.app/InsideSafe>.

Figure 29

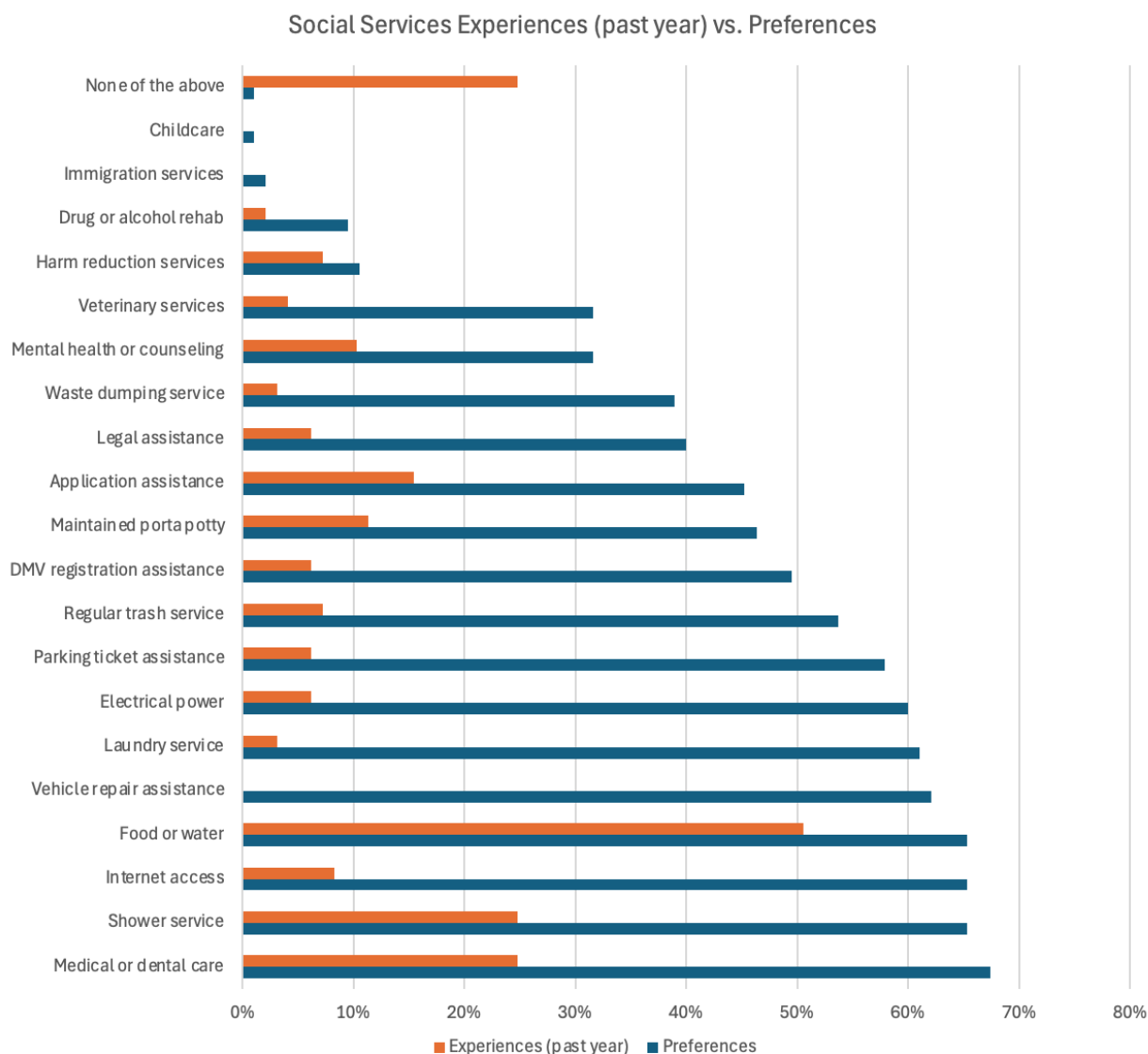


For social services not necessarily related to shelter/housing programs, we found that vehicle residents had a wide variety of needs not met by current efforts⁸. For example, 67% expressed a desire for medical or dental care but only 25% had received such care over the past year, which is similar to the response for shower services. Notably, 62% of vehicle residents expressed a desire for vehicle repair assistance and none had received such a service over the past year; the only such service we are aware of is for participants of a safe parking program and on a discretionary basis at that. Desire for parking ticket assistance was also high (58%), but on a related question only 6% of vehicle residents said that they'd ever participated in Los Angeles' Community Assistance Parking Program (CAPP) for parking ticket forgiveness, and many didn't even know about it, showcasing issues with both publicizing and accessing the program. Ultimately, many of these needs (e.g., shower, internet, laundry, electrical power, trash service, toilet) could be met in conventional housing, but it's worth questioning why given a lack of affordable housing there aren't intermediate solutions

⁸ One limitation of this question is that it only asked about whether one received such a service in the past year, not the frequency of the service. As an example, we do not interpret the fact that 51% of vehicle residents received food/water over the past year as evidence that a majority of vehicle residents don't experience periods of hunger or dehydration.

provided at more encampments. For example, one vehicle camp we visited had no public trash receptacles yet was regularly swept, which is a costly trade-off. We tackle this and related policy questions in the next and final section of our report: our policy recommendations.

Figure 30



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In Los Angeles and across California, government officials have adopted a “carrot and stick” approach to resolving visible instances of vehicular homelessness. As we’ve shown in this report, the “stick” of this approach includes ticketing, towing, displacement, dispossession, and tolerated forms of harassment by housed neighbors, businesses and private security. And the “carrot” includes offers of shelter or housing that often never manifest. We have shown how this approach harms vehicle residents by heightening daily stress and exposing them to street homelessness in cases of towing. Further, the forced mobility, debt and dispossession of these practices both prevent vehicle residents from improving their own situations and hinder the ability to deliver existing social services. We propose an alternative policy vision that is built upon mutual respect and trust rather than us vs. them politicking. In particular, we argue for a divestment from criminalization and investment in parking stability paired with supportive services that enable access to affordable housing.

Divestment from Criminalization

While criminalization often refers to arrests and incarceration, it also entails police move-along orders, ticketing, towing and forms of tolerated harassment from non-government actors. The number one reason that vehicle residents we surveyed moved was because they were told to by city or county officials, resulting in forced mobility that upsets any semblance of stability for them and creates issues with services follow-through. Vehicle dwellings are targeted by parking enforcement for citation, with most vehicle residents we surveyed having some form of citation debt, and nearly half have lost a vehicle they were living in to towing at some point in their lives. Beyond the “stick” employed by city, county and state authorities, vehicle residents must contend with harassment from non-government actors, including vigilantism. Vehicle residents we surveyed have had their vehicle dwellings damaged by angry housed neighbors, their parking spots illegally removed by neighboring businesses, and their sense of security threatened by security services that employ illegal intimidation tactics (e.g., Ghost Town Security).

Unfortunately, elected officials are currently doubling down on criminalization in response to the growth of vehicle dwellings over the Covid-19 pandemic and backlash from conventionally housed constituents and business owners. In West LA, Council District 11 representative Traci Park has made vehicle dwellings a publicized target of her homeless policy, calling them “nuisance vehicles” in her weekly e-newsletters and social media posts to constituents and encouraging the public to report them to her office (see figure 31). She’s proudly declared that her office has removed “hundreds” of RVs from the streets and that “impacted communities are now safer and more

accessible¹,” but she barely mentions efforts to shelter or house those she dispossesses. That’s because the RVs she’s removing often aren’t receiving sufficient outreach (or any outreach at all) ahead of these punitive operations, as we witnessed time and again speaking to people who were either about to have their dwelling towed or had just experienced it. The city’s own statistics on vehicle dwelling operations support our findings: from June through August of 2024, there were 85 vehicle dwelling operations across the city for 873 vehicle dwellings, and of those 370 were ticketed, 240 were impounded, and only 56 people were housed².

Figure 31 (Source: Los Angeles Councilmember Traci Park’s June 14, 2025 e-newsletter).



RV Removals & Community Care – This week, we removed another four RVs along Washington Boulevard as part of our ongoing efforts to clear nuisance vehicles, improve safety, and restore coastal access in the area. And, our beautification teams did weed abatement in Playa Vista and across the Westside. If you need assistance, submit a request through LA311 and reach out to our office — we’re here to help.

In other words, Councilmember Park’s punitive approach to vehicle dwellings isn’t unique, as we witnessed during a hastily planned multi-week sweep of Cotner Avenue just over the border in Council District 5 (run by Katy Yaroslavsky) that saw vehicle dwellings destroyed literally in front of the eyes of their residents and scant housing

¹ For an example of Councilmember Park’s regular social media posts about towing vehicle dwellings, please see: https://www.instagram.com/reel/DG_GicSpboW/?igsh=Mzc3ZTVIOWMwZA%3D%3D. One member of our team spoke to a family who was living in the towed schoolie featured in Park’s video; the family thought they were on a housing waitlist, but instead of being housed they experienced their home being towed.

² Office of the City Administrative Officer. 2024. *Homeless Emergency Declaration – 2024-25 First Quarterly Report* (Council File No. 23-0652). https://clkrep.lacity.org/online/docs/2023/23-0652-s5_rpt_cao_9-12-24.pdf.

resources offered. We have heard reports of similarly punitive operations occurring in the San Fernando Valley and other parts of the city. Further, wealthy neighboring cities like Santa Monica have adopted policies of wholesale exclusion of “oversized” vehicle dwellings like RVs from street parking and overnight beach parking, pushing them into surrounding cities where they often cluster along certain blocks where they have not yet been banned³.

Given the sharing of strategies and resources across city and county governments, these punitive practices are not confined to Los Angeles but are present across California and beyond. While LA County’s “Pathway Home” program⁴ appears to do a better job of pairing shelter/housing offers with vehicle impoundment than the City of Los Angeles, we stand firmly against using vehicle impoundments as a “stick” to push vehicle residents into accepting whatever shelter/housing resources the government has at the time. Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass’ advocacy with California Assembly Member Mark González to introduce Assembly Bill 630, which will enable impounded RVs to be more easily destroyed⁵, is a clear continuation of punitive practices driven in part by misinformed ideas of “service resistance.” If some people prefer living in rundown RVs to the sorts of shelter and housing programs offered (if any are offered to begin with), then government officials ought to critically question the efficacy of their programs rather than seeking to make vehicle residents more desperate by destroying their vehicles and leaving them on the streets.

Investment in Parking Stability, Supportive Services, and Affordable Housing

The success of any program needs to be about housing and services, not a street void of human beings. And that success begins with trust and developing a mutual understanding of each vehicle resident’s needs, which vary widely. As demonstrated in our survey, some vehicle residents don’t see themselves as “homeless” or “unhoused” and have material circumstances that satisfy most (if not all) of their daily needs. That is not to say that these vehicle residents wouldn’t benefit from supportive services or conventional housing; rather, it’s a reminder to meet them where they’re at, including recognizing the value that their vehicle dwelling has for them. Other vehicle residents are desperate to get out of their vehicles and into services and housing, but may distrust a system of inconsistent outreach. The spectrum of vehicle residency experiences is a

³ Council District 11, where most of our survey took place, has by far the most oversized vehicle ordinances of any part of the city (i.e., more than 300 if one includes the Venice Coastal Zone). For more information on oversized vehicle ordinances and a map, please see the LA City Controller’s analysis: <https://ovo-zones.lacontroller.app/>.

⁴ For public information on LA County’s Pathway Home, please see: <https://homeless.lacounty.gov/pathway-home/>.

⁵ Specifically, California Assembly Bill 630 will raise the maximum assessed value at which an impounded RV can be destroyed without a lien from \$500 to \$4,000. Currently, vehicles in this value range can be sold at police auctions to the general public, but government officials are upset that these vehicles sometimes end up used for shelter on the streets again. For more information on AB 630, please see: <https://a54.asmdc.org/press-releases/20250408-assemblymember-mark-gonzalez-introduces-bill-address-rv-encampments-and>.

reminder that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to supporting vehicle residents, and that politically driven decisions about who gets what services will inevitably leave many of the most vulnerable out of the picture as resources are instead spent on appeasing neighbors’ complaints⁶. As such, our call for investment in parking stability, supportive services and affordable housing is premised upon honoring the diversity of vehicle residents and re-calibrating the impetus for government action away from neighbors’ complaints and towards vehicle resident needs.

Given vehicle residents’ experiences with forced mobility and the difficulties in connecting a mobile population to services, we advocate for establishing parking stability through safe and stable parking models. We understand parking stability as a principle that may be operationalized through any number of models, with safe parking the most well-known. Safe parking establishes a secure parking site with basic amenities (e.g., bathroom) and access to supportive services to help move people into conventional housing. Within Los Angeles, most of these sites are overnight-only and exclude “oversized” vehicles like RVs, which can work as a model for certain populations but notably excludes a majority of the 13,549 vehicle dwellings counted for the 2024 Homeless Count on vehicle size alone. Further, there are nowhere near enough sites or spots within them to absorb even a small fraction of vehicle residents: as of January 2024, there were only 14 such sites across the City of LA with capacity for 349 vehicles⁷. We call for safe parking sites that are 24/7, inclusive of oversized vehicles like RVs, and low barrier to entry. As such, we call for working with vehicle residents to make their vehicles “street legal” (i.e., operable, insured, and registered, with certified ownership) both within and outside of safe parking programs.

Parking stability can also be achieved through stable parking models, which according to Dr. Graham Pruss includes similar amenities to safe parking but usually without the social services. Stable parking can provide space for people living in vehicles who aren’t seeking to transition into conventional housing, often because they have a vehicle that is suitable for them as housing and only require long-term parking and access to basic amenities in the vein of a typical RV park. We might even think of these sorts of stable parking sites as state-funded RV parks which can act as both homeless diversion and/or low-cost rental parking programs for those who can pay⁸.

But given the tens of thousands of vehicle residents living in Los Angeles and the logistics of acquiring suitable sites for safe and stable parking programs, we also advocate for more street-based parking for vehicle residents. As put forth by UCLA

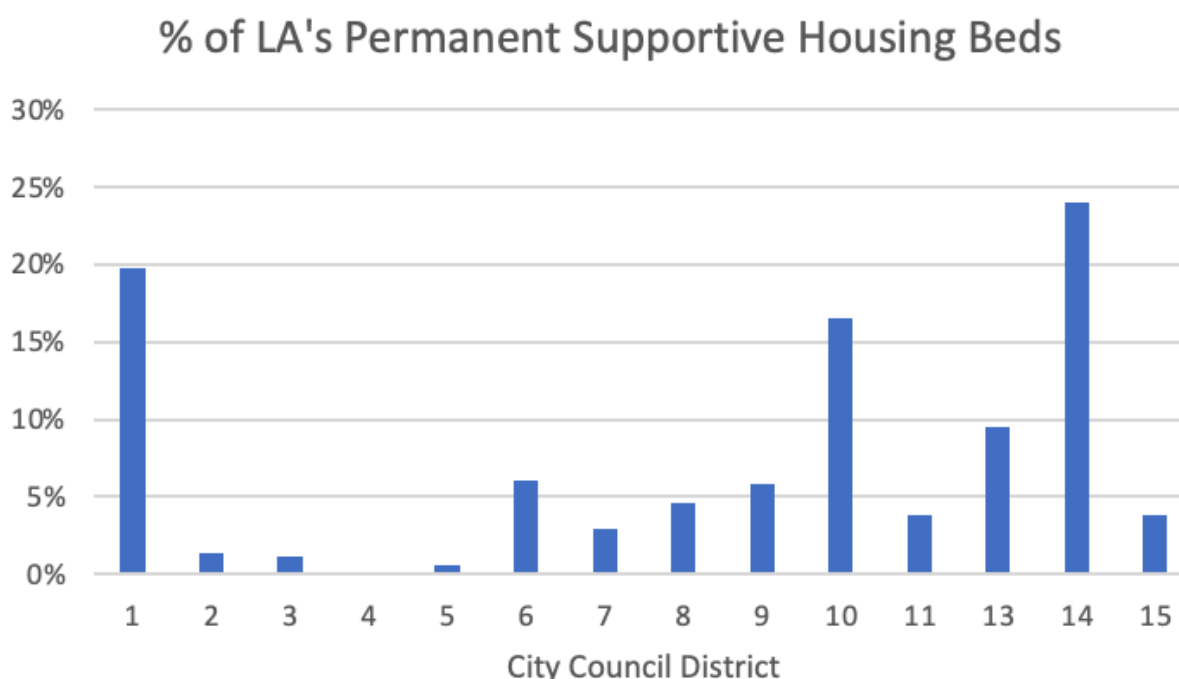
⁶ Herring, Chris. 2019. “Complaint-Oriented Policing: Regulating Homelessness in Public Space.” *American Sociological Review*. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0003122419872671>.

⁷ Calculations made using LA City Controller’s January 2024 map of LA City safe parking sites: <https://safe-parking.lacontroller.app/>.

⁸ Pruss, Graham, Kelly Knight, Ned Resnikoff, and Margot Kushel. 2022. *The Long Road Home: Housing and Service Needs of People Who Inhabit Oversized Vehicles in Oakland’s Public Parking*. UCSF Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative. <https://homelessness.ucsf.edu/resources/long-road-home-housing-and-service-needs-people-who-inhabit-oversized-vehicles>.

Professor Adam Millard-Ball, “cities could permit camper van parking on the right-of-way, analogous to liveaboard canal boats that provide housing options in some UK cities⁹.” Ironically, some of the places most suitable for this sort of parking, such as streets adjacent to parks and away from residential streets, have been explicitly targeted to remove and prevent vehicle residents from staying there. At such sites, community good neighbor agreements could be created with input from vehicle residents, conventionally housed neighbors and other local stakeholders to ensure that mutual respect flourishes.

Figure 32 (Source: 2024 Housing Inventory Count, author’s own calculations)



Parking stability with supportive services must be connected with a robust affordable housing pipeline and voucher system. Local attempts to thwart affordable and supportive housing projects like Venice Dell, which would provide 120 units for people experiencing homelessness and low-income tenants, are clearly counterproductive to solving homelessness¹⁰. This is especially true given that 79% of vehicle residents we surveyed indicated they’d choose to accept an offer for a low-income reserved apartment or permanent supportive housing, which is exactly what Venice Dell would provide. Given that Council District 11 only has 4% of the city’s permanent supportive housing beds (see figure 32), it’s imperative that local officials

⁹ Millard-Ball, Adam. 2021. “Viewpoint: Turning Streets into Housing.” *Journal of Transport and Land Use* 14(1):1061–73. doi:[10.5198/jtlu.2021.2020](https://doi.org/10.5198/jtlu.2021.2020).

¹⁰ The *Los Angeles Times* Editorial Board has endorsed Venice Dell and decried its politicized opposition on several occasions, including: <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2025-03-23/los-angeles-opposition-venice-dell-homeless-housing-project>.

make good faith efforts to ensure every affordable housing project proposed gets priority, not political interference on behalf of their base. The Trump administration’s proposals to end federal funding for permanent supportive housing, making 315,000 current participants vulnerable to homelessness¹¹, makes local support of permanent supportive housing projects all the more important.

Beyond affordable housing development, we also call for expanding voucher programs that enable vehicle residents and low-income people in general to access market-rate housing subsidies. That includes vouchers like Section 8, for which the waitlist in Los Angeles has been closed due to potentially disastrous cuts by the Trump administration¹². Given the fact that 82% of vehicle residents surveyed said they’d choose a housing voucher if offered one and slow construction of affordable housing, we believe that Section 8 voucher funding should be dramatically expanded by the federal government. While that clearly won’t happen under this hostile federal administration, we believe expansion of affordable housing and vouchers could be an attractive piece of a national platform to defeat Trumpism.

A Call for Advocacy

While not a specific policy recommendation, we’d like to end with a call to advocacy for vehicle residents, from national to state to local levels. Depending on one’s position, this can look any number of different ways. For example, social service providers should stand up for their clients who are vehicle residents, advocating from within the system against criminalization and for parking stability, supportive services and affordable housing. Well-funded systems of support would make their jobs all the more rewarding. And for those who are too often boxed out of the homeless services system by defensive politicians and bureaucrats, such as our fellow mutual aid groups and activists, we call for not only advocacy but also mitigation of criminalization through “know your rights” outreach and clinics for vehicle repairs and ticketing. We’re also more than happy to teach other groups what we know about conducting surveys for advocacy. Our sincere hope is that these survey findings and policy recommendations help lay the foundation for an alternative to the current systems in place for vehicle residents, which are inadequate and harmful in Los Angeles and beyond. In other words, we hope that the phrase “Keep Moving” won’t be so painfully obvious as a title for future reports on vehicle residency.

¹¹ For a breakdown of different “Housing First” programs, including permanent supportive housing and rapid rehousing, please see: Culhane, Dennis, Matthew Fowle and Joy Moses. 2025. *How Much Would It Cost to Provide Housing First to All Households Staying in Homeless Shelters?* National Alliance to End Homelessness.

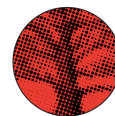
<https://endhomelessness.org/resources/research-and-analysis/how-much-would-it-cost-to-provide-housing-first-to-all-households-staying-in-homeless-shelters>.

¹² For an overview of how the Trump administration’s proposed cuts to a variety of housing programs would impact California, please see: Christopher, Ben and Marisa Kendall. 2025. “Millions out on the street virtually overnight’: How Trump’s budget proposal could affect California.” *CalMatters*.

<https://calmatters.org/housing/2025/05/trump-budget-proposal-ca/>.

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