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California Traffic SafetySurvey 2026: Overview of results and key findings

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California Traffic Safety Survey 2026

Overview of results and key findings

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Chapter 1. Overview of the 2026 Survey

The California Traffic Safety Survey is an annual survey overseen by the University of California Berkeley Safe Transportation Research and Education Center (SafeTREC) and sponsored by the California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS). This statewide survey, initiated in 2010, collects data on public safety perceptions, driver behavior, and awareness of traffic safety campaigns. While administered in person through 2019, the survey transitioned to a self-administered online panel in 2020. The online survey takes approximately five to ten minutes to complete. Eligible participants must be California residents who are at least 18 years old and hold a valid driver's license.

Data collection for the 2026 survey, administered from June to July 2026, is now complete. This report describes the survey results and highlights key insights to inform targeted strategies to address road safety.

1.1. Respondent Demographics

Overall, 10,014 California residents responded to the 2026 survey, a sample size 4.3 times that of 2025 (vs. $n = 2,316$). The survey captures two key demographic factors: gender and age. Respondents are evenly distributed between men ($n = 4,927$; 50%) and women ($n = 4,992$; 50%), with no respondents identifying as non-binary. The survey oversampled young and middle-aged adults. Young adults aged 18–24 account for 20% of the overall survey population, while they make up 9.1% of the statewide population. Adults aged 25–54 make up 60% of the survey population, relative to 41.2% of the statewide population (see **Table 1**). This oversampling approach was adopted to account for the disproportionate involvement of younger drivers in traffic fatalities relative to their statewide population share, as well as the greater total vehicle miles traveled by middle-aged adults.

1.2. Survey Design

The 2026 survey includes three major design improvements over previous years: (1) adopting more detailed age categories aligned with national and state traffic safety reporting systems, (2) integrating Safe System principles into the survey design by using human-centered language and asking broader questions about human error and vulnerability, and (3) expanding geographical coverage via a significantly larger, more representative statewide sample. The summary below outlines how these improvements enhance this ongoing traffic safety effort and provide state agencies with evidence-based insights to facilitate the transition toward safer systems.

1.2.1. More Inclusive Demographic Groups: Age Range

Two changes were made to the survey's age categories for 2026. First, the 2026 survey separates the single 18–24 age range used in 2025 into two groups: 18–20 and 21–24 (**Table 1**). This change captures key behavioral differences highlighted by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA): safety concerns among newer young drivers aged 18–20 are primarily driven by lack of driving experience and cell phone distraction, while drivers aged 21–24 experience a sharp increase in speeding, lower seatbelt compliance, and driving under the influence following legal access to alcohol at age 21.

Second, the 2026 survey adopts more detailed categories for older populations to reflect broader societal and demographic shifts, with older adults remaining active, employed, and driving much later in life. The newly adopted age groups in 2026 include 65–74 and 75 or older, while the 2025 survey combined older adults and middle-aged individuals using a single 55–70 age range (**Table 1**). This change permits age-group analysis that aligns with state and national reporting standards used by the California Office of Traffic Safety, UC Berkeley SafeTREC, and NHTSA.

Table 1. Survey Sample Size and Share by Age Group.

Age Range	ACS 5Y Estimates	Weighted Survey Sample Share	Unweighted Survey Sample Size	Comparison between 2026 and 2025	
				Year 2026	Year 2025
18–20	9.1%	10%	1,000	18–20	18–24
21–24		10%	1,000	21–24	
25–34	14.8%	20%	2,000	25–34	Same with 2026
35–44	13.9%	20%	2,000	35–44	
45–54	12.5%	20%	1,999	45–54	
55–64	12.0%	10%	1,000	55–64	55–70 and 71 or older
65–74	9.2%	5.0%	500	65–74	
75 or older	6.5%	5.0%	500	75 or older	

Note: Due to missing data, the unweighted survey sample size is adjusted to 10,012 (vs. 10,014 reported above). Source: U.S. Census Bureau. "Age and Sex" American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S0101, 2024, <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2024.S0101?q=S0101>: Accessed on August 17, 2026.

1.2.2. Redefining Safety Culture: Human-Centered Design

The 2026 survey incorporates several subtle yet impactful changes to cultivate a safety culture that accounts for a wider variety of human error and supports human-centered system design—principles closely aligned with the Safe System framework. Specifically, when assessing the

perceived safety impacts of driving behavior (Q2), the 2026 survey separates alcohol and cannabis impairment, introduces factors such as drowsy and prescription drug-impaired driving, and increases focus on vulnerable road users by collecting data on child safety equipment and failures to yield to pedestrians or bicyclists—data that prior surveys did not capture.

The survey also expands retrospective data collection on self-reported driver behaviors over the past 30 days (Q4). While the 2025 survey evaluated only cell phone use, the 2026 version adds questions on speeding, voice command usage, and in-dash car apps. The 2026 survey also introduces questions on bystander intervention (Qs 5 & 6) to assess respondents' actions and comfort levels in influencing others and prevent human error before it leads to adverse safety outcomes.

Additionally, compared to the single-choice “primary mode” question used in 2025, the 2026 survey assesses general travel behavior (Q16) using a standardized five-point Likert scale, yielding more granular frequency data across all transportation modes.

1.2.3. Increasing the Representation of Previously Underserved Areas

The 2026 survey collected data across all 58 California counties (**Table 2**). Overall, the 2026 survey reached full statewide representation at the county level, including Plumas and Mono counties, which were not captured in prior surveys. By region, Southern California accounts for more than half of the overall survey population (54.3%); Northern and Central California make up 28.7% and 17.0% of the sample, respectively. Compared to 2025, the 2026 survey increased the sample share for both Central California (from 12.8% in 2025 to 17.0% in 2026) and Northern California (from 28.1% in 2025 to 28.7% in 2026).

To ensure analytical rigor and generalizability, we applied a standard threshold requiring a minimum sample size of $n \geq 30$ per county for in-depth analysis (**Table 2**, where counties below the threshold are greyed out). Using this criterion, the number of eligible counties for the county-level analysis nearly tripled, from 14 (or 24.1%) in 2025 to 39 (or 67.2%) in 2026. This expanded geographical coverage substantially enhanced representation across Northern and Central California, areas with high concentrations of state-designated underserved populations. In Northern California, the proportion of eligible counties increased from 14.7% ($n = 5$ of 34) to 55.9% ($n = 19$). Similarly, Central California's eligible counties increased from 17.6% ($n = 3$ of 17) to 76.5% ($n = 13$). Southern California reached complete regional representation, with 100% of its counties meeting the threshold ($n = 7$ of 7).

Table 2. Completed Surveys by County (Non-weighted Sample Size [n]) in 2026 and 2025.

Northern California (n = 34)			Central California (n = 17)			Southern California (n = 7)		
County	2026	2025	County	2026	2025	County	2026	2025
Sub total	2,870	651	Sub total	1,708	297	Sub total	5,436	1,368
% of total	28.7%	28.1%	% of total	17.0%	12.8%	% of total	54.3%	59.1%
Alameda	339	101	Calaveras	54	3	Imperial	44	7
Alpine	18	1	Fresno	385	60	LA	2,793	665
Amador	27	1	Inyo	6	1	Orange	595	161
Butte	128	17	Kern	253	63	Riverside	564	160
Colusa	24	1	Kings	48	11	S. Bernard.	587	138
Contra Costa	254	61	Madera	79	9	San Diego	716	189
Del Norte	31	5	Merced	96	11	Ventura	137	48
El Dorado	63	18	Mono	4	NA			
Glenn	13	1	Monterey	75	16			
Humboldt	57	15	San Benito	26	1			
Lake	31	4	San Joaquin	225	43			
Lassen	24	1	S. Luis Obispo	66	10			
Marin	42	6	Santa Barbara	74	15			
Mariposa	16	1	Santa Cruz	36	8			
Mendocino	19	1	Stanislaus	141	27			
Modoc	9	2	Tulare	128	18			
Napa	27	2	Tuolumne	12	1			
Nevada	29	8						
Placer	108	26						
Plumas	6	NA						
Sacramento	569	123						
S. Francisco	279	57						
San Mateo	89	28						
Santa Clara	256	82						
Shasta	55	12						
Sierra	3	NA						
Siskiyou	17	1						
Solano	114	23						
Sonoma	90	26						
Sutter	27	3						
Tehama	32	4						
Trinity	7	1						
Yolo	35	14						
Yuba	32	5						

Still, a large sample size alone does not guarantee proportionate representation. **Figure 1** shows the county-level sample rate for the 2026 survey, calculated as the total number of respondents divided by the county population. Across California, the mean sample rate is 0.25 respondents per 1,000 residents, with most counties falling below this statewide baseline. Future survey waves can use targeted recruitment strategies to improve representation in currently underrepresented areas.

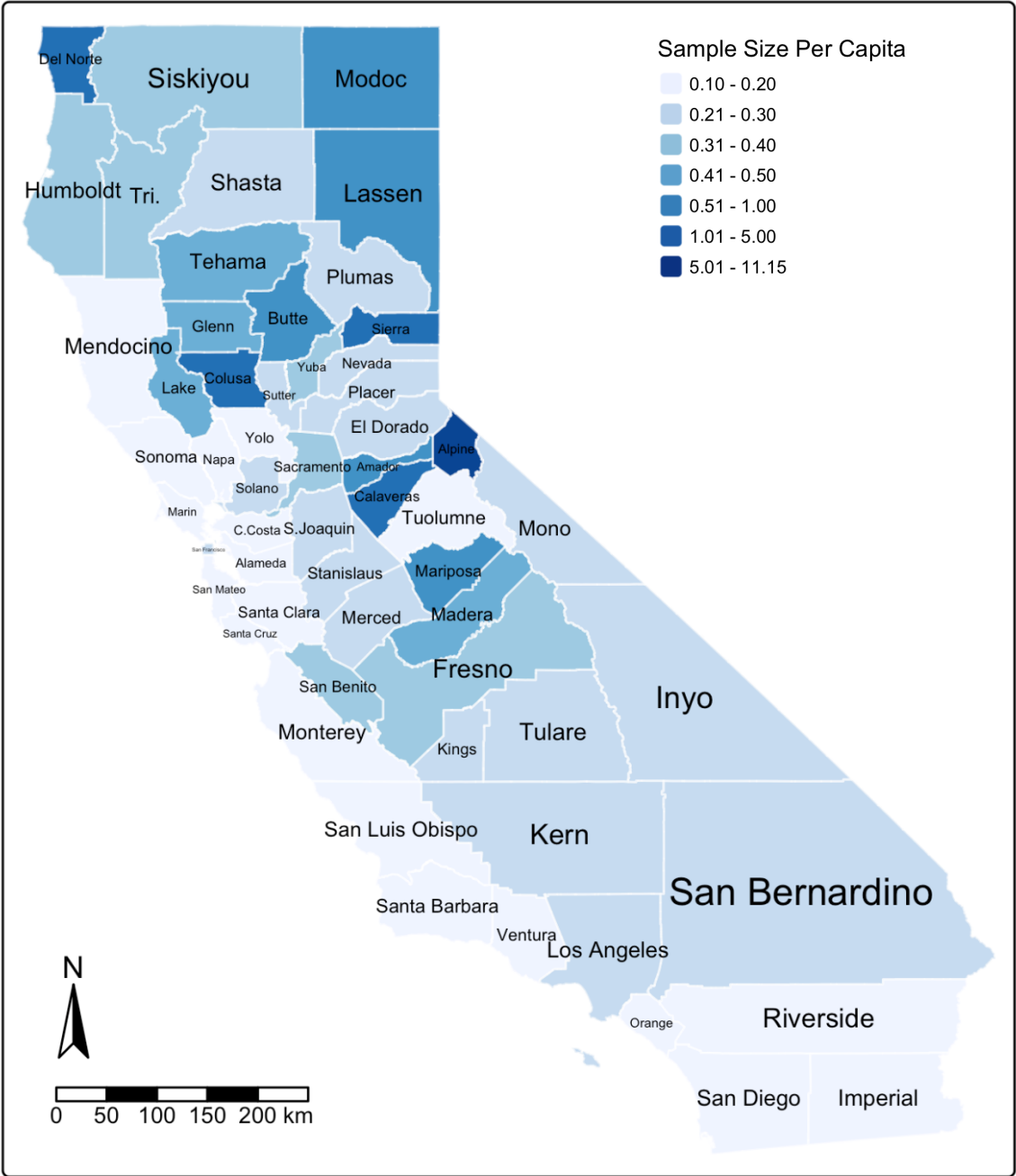


Figure 1. The 2026 Survey Sample Size Per Capita (per 1,000 residents) by County.

1.3. Methods and Reporting Thresholds

All estimates are weighted to the California adult population by age and gender using the provided survey weights. Responses of "Don't know" and "Prefer not to answer" are excluded from the denominator, following the convention used in prior waves, which means denominators differ modestly across items.

Estimates are suppressed where the age or gender group contains fewer than 30 respondents or where fewer than 10 respondents fall in the sub-group cell. The first threshold follows the National Center for Health Statistics Data Presentation Standards for Proportions, which treat a proportion as unreliable below a denominator of 30. The second guards against percentages that rest on a stable base but a very small count. Suppression in this section is concentrated among men aged 65 and older, where several response options fall below the threshold, and suppressed cells are marked in the figures.

All figures are self-reported. The survey measures what respondents say about risk and about their own behavior rather than observed behavior, and self-reported intervention may be subject to social desirability bias. Percentages in this section are computed from the age and gender crosstabulation and may differ by a few tenths of a point from single variable tabulations of the same item

Chapter 2. Bicycling Frequency and Traffic Safety Perspective

Overall, 9,887 participants reported how often they ride a bicycle on public roads on a five-point frequency scale ranging from “Never” to “Daily.” Responses were collapsed into three road user groups: people who never bike (5,271; 53%), people who bike monthly or a few times a year (3,214; 33%), and people who bike weekly or daily (1,402; 14%). Together these groups describe a population in which roughly half of California travelers report no bicycling activity at all and around one in seven ride weekly or more frequently.

Several changes to the California Traffic Safety Survey in 2026 make it possible to conduct bicycling exposure-based analysis of safety perception in ways previously impossible. In 2026, a new question was introduced to the survey (Q16) that asks respondents to provide their level of exposure to several transport modes ranging from “never” to “daily.” Previously, respondents were simply asked to select what transport mode they mostly utilized. The introduction of a scale of activity makes it possible to explore if increased bicycling activity is associated with changes in safety perception. In addition, because cycling is a relatively uncommon mode choice, cycling respondents have been relatively smaller in count than other modes. This has made stratifying responses on cycling activity challenging. In the 2026 survey, the increased sample size has made more granular analysis of cyclist sentiment possible.

2.1. General Characteristics of Bicyclists

Bicycling frequency is strongly patterned by gender and age. Women make up 60% of people who never bike and only 33% of those who ride weekly or daily, while the male share climbs from 40% to 67% across the same groups (**Figure 2**). The gender composition of the frequent riding group is close to a two to one male majority.

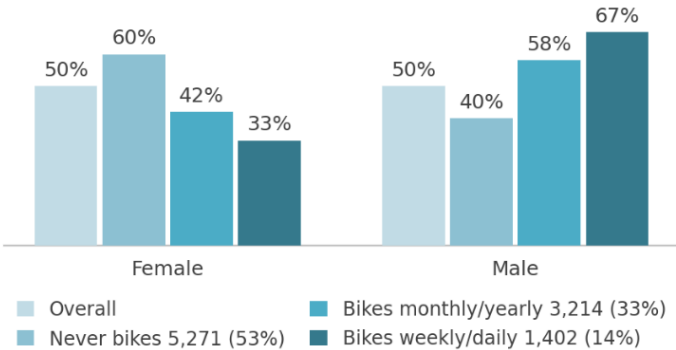


Figure 2. Bicycling Frequency and Gender

Bicycling frequency is also strongly associated with younger age. For all age groups between 18 and 54, a greater share of respondents reported biking frequently (defined as weekly or daily) than never biking. This flips for the age groups starting with aged 55-64. For older people, the share who reported never biking is highest (**Figure 3**).

Frequent cyclists are, in short, younger and more likely to be men than the survey population, and both characteristics track with higher self-reported risk taking elsewhere in the instrument.

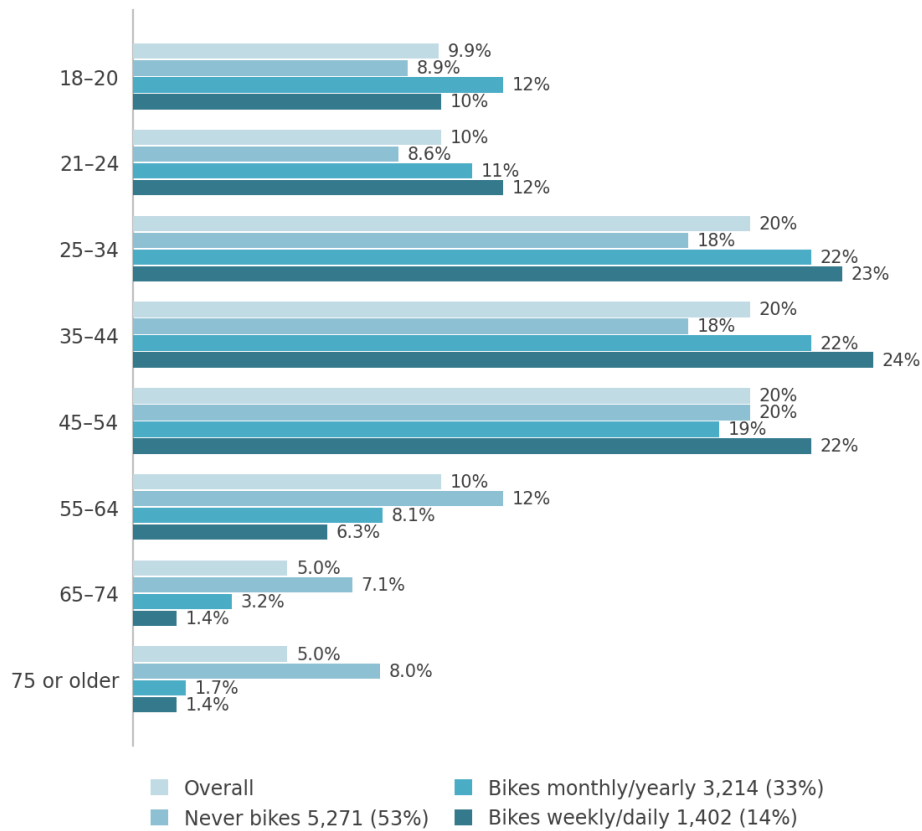


Figure 3. Bicycling Frequency and Age

Bicycling is generally not a substitute for driving. Half of frequent and occasional bicyclists still drive daily (50%), only marginally below the 55% of people who never bike (Figure 4).

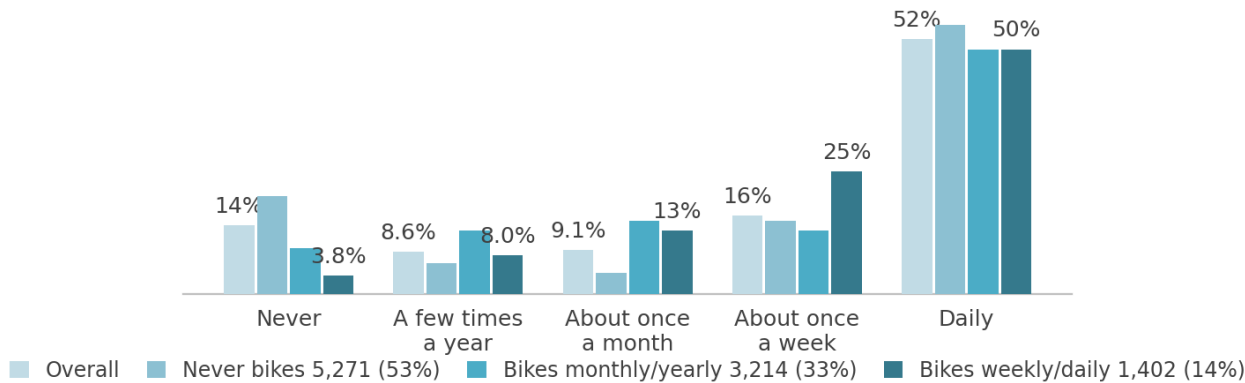


Figure 4. Frequency of Driving a Motor Vehicle on Public Roads by Bicycling Frequency

2.2. Bicyclists and Perception of Significant Driver Risks

When asked to identify significant driver safety risks on California roadways (all that apply), people who never bike endorse every one of the nine listed risks at higher rates than people who ride weekly or daily (**Figure 5**). In general, the overall pattern suggest that cyclists are less likely to label behaviors, even driver behaviors, as risks compared to non-cyclists.

The largest gaps appear on the risks that dominate traditional traffic safety messaging: distracted driving (80% vs. 63%), driving under the influence of alcohol (79% vs. 64%), and speeding or aggressive driving (77% vs. 61%). Occasional riders sit consistently between the two. Notably, the driver risk that has the most similar frequency of selection across the three levels of cycling activity is “Failure to yield to pedestrians or bicyclists,” the risk most directly experienced by people on bikes (49% among people who never bike vs. 44% among weekly and daily riders).

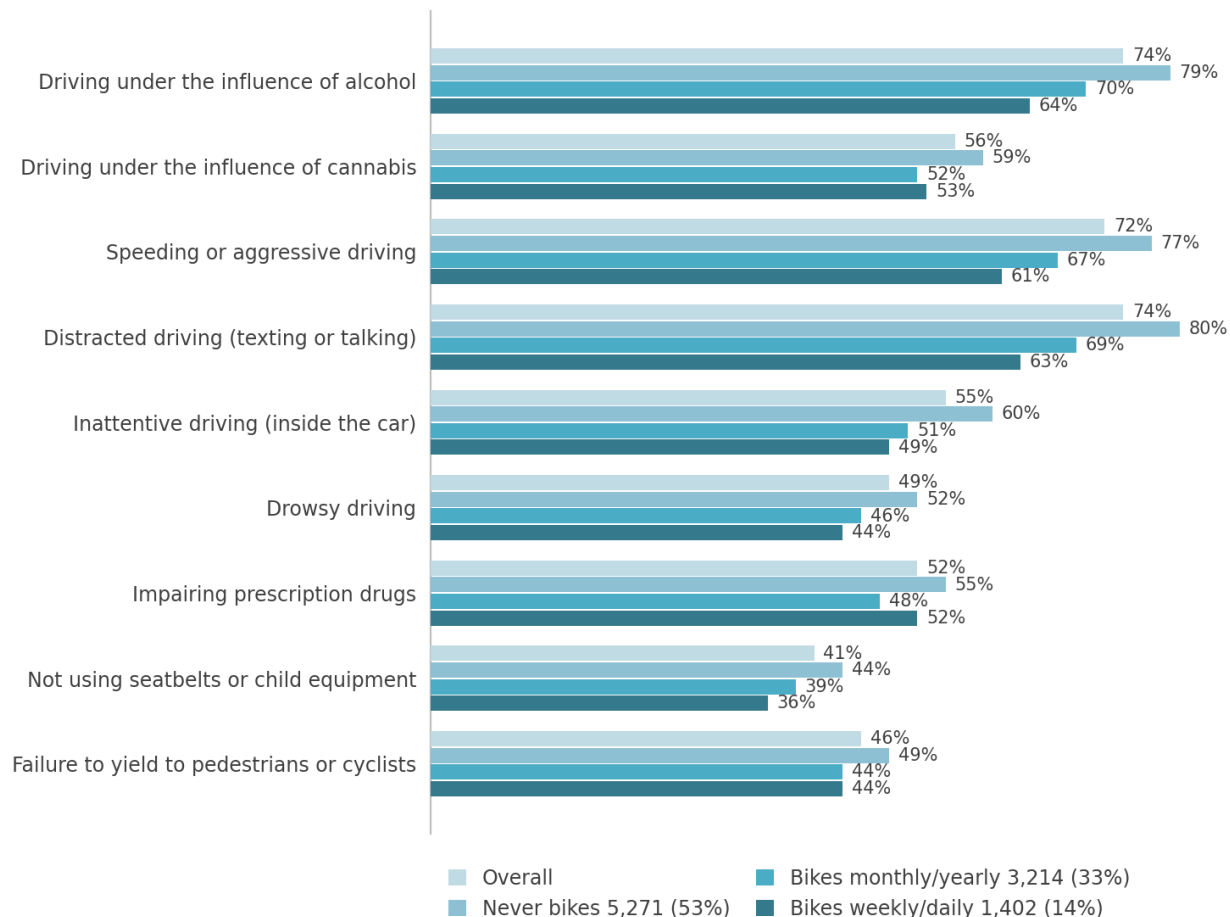


Figure 5. Perception of Risky Driving Behaviors by Bicycling Frequency

The most consistent finding in this segmentation is that bicycling frequency is positively associated with self-reported risky behaviors. Weekly and daily bicyclists report driving 10 mph or more over the speed limit “always” at 3.9 times the rate of people who never bike (14% vs. 3.6%), 195 out of 1,407 respondents who reported biking daily or weekly. Occasional bicyclists report speeding activity more consistently with the never bike group (Figure 6). Overall, 5.3% of respondents reported always driving more than 10 mph over the limit, and 10% reported usually speeding by 10 mph.

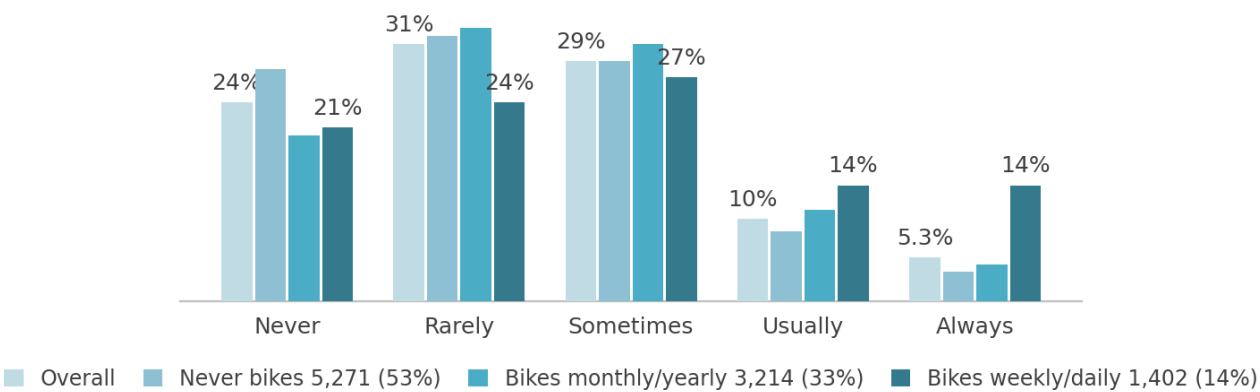


Figure 6. Recently Driven 10 mph or More Over the Speed Limit (Past 30 Days) by Bicycling Frequency

The same pattern is present for phone use, including in responses to questions about holding and talking on a phone, driving while reading or looking at a phone, and texting while driving. This suggests that the same people who are bicycling daily or weekly are also engaging in risky cell phone behavior when driving (Figure 7, Figure 8, Figure 9, and Figure 10).

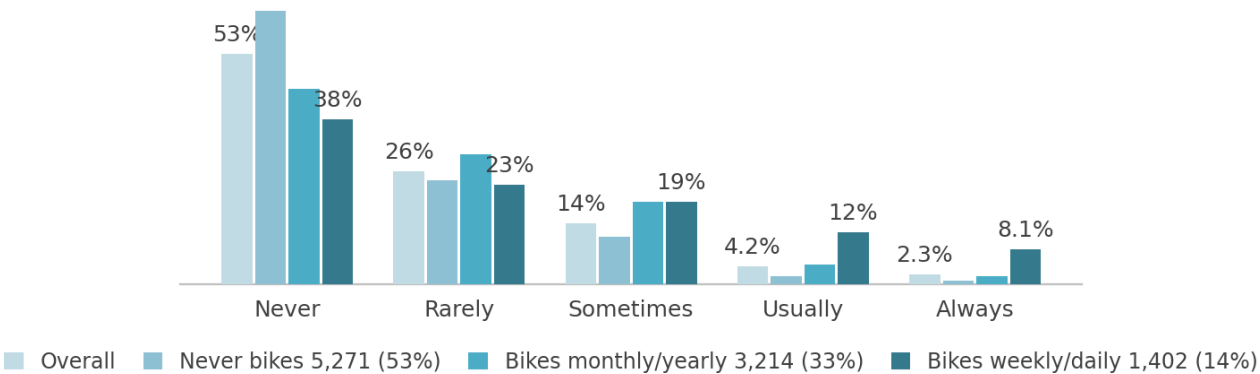


Figure 7. Recently Driven While Holding/Talking on a Cell Phone (Past 30 Days) by Bicycling Frequency

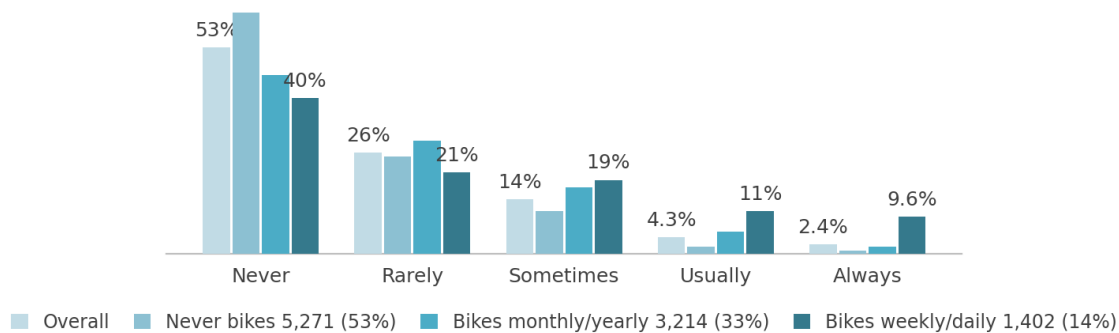


Figure 8. Recently Driven While Reading/Looking at a Cell Phone (Past 30 Days) by Bicycling Frequency

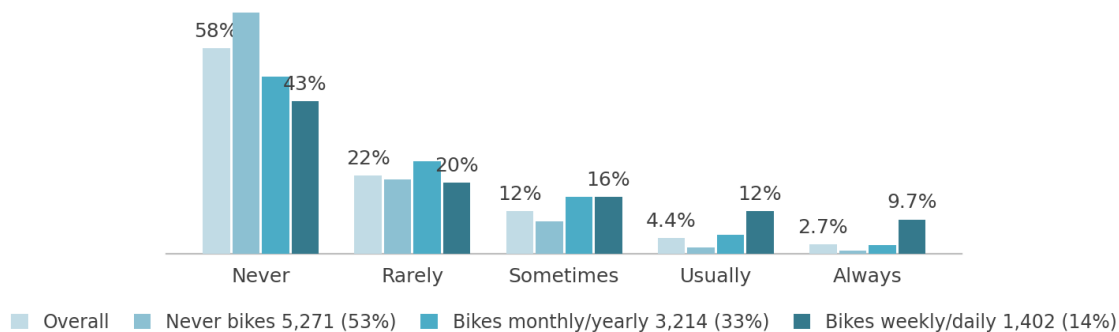


Figure 9. Recently Driven While Manually Typing/Interacting with a Cell Phone (Past 30 Days) by Bicycling Frequency

The same general trend of engaging in self-reported risky behaviors is present when it comes to substance use and intoxication. Among respondents, 80% of people who never bike report never driving within an hour of consuming alcohol compared with 52% of weekly and daily riders (**Figure 10**). Driving within an hour of using cannabis shows the same pattern, with 20% of frequent riders reporting “usually” or “always” compared with 2.8% of people who never bike (**Figure 11**).

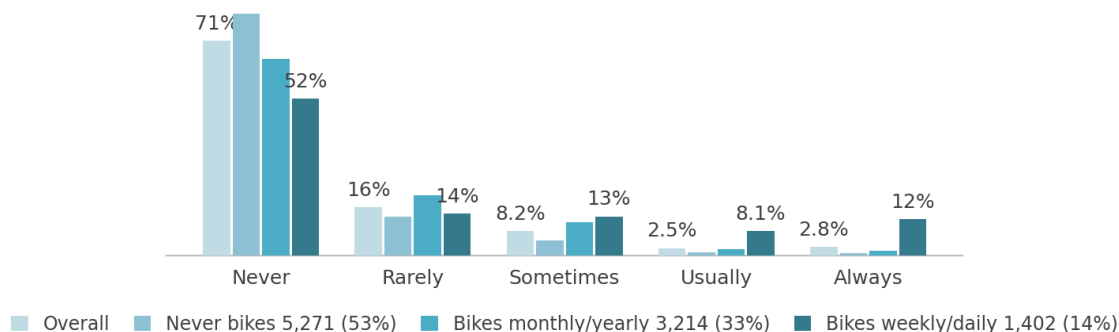


Figure 10. Recently Driven a Vehicle Within an Hour of Consuming any Amount of Alcohol (Past Six Months) by Bicycling Frequency

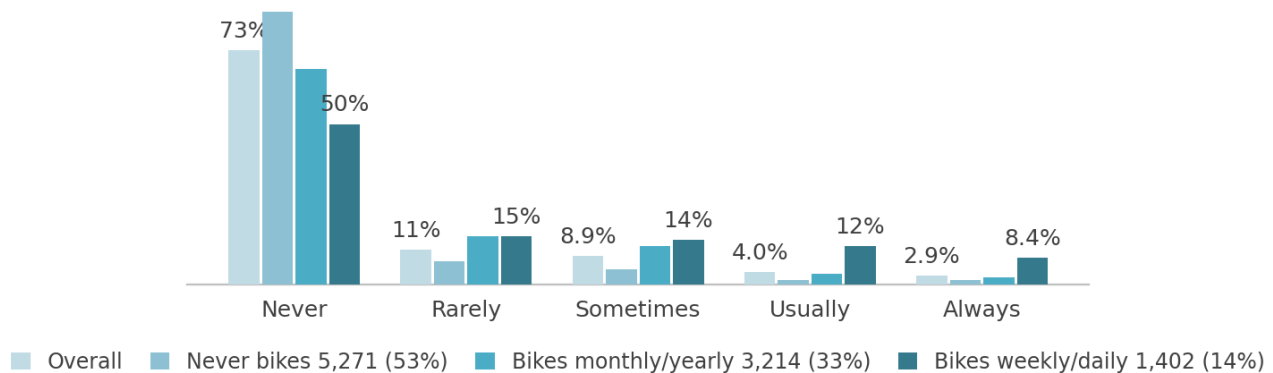


Figure 11. Recently Driven a Vehicle Within an Hour of Using Cannabis (Past Six Months) by Bicycling Frequency

2.3. Bicycling and Perception of Danger on the Roadway

Frequent bicyclists rate driving itself as far more hazardous than occasional or never bicyclists. Thirty five percent call driving a motor vehicle on public roads very or extremely dangerous, whereas only 20% of people who never bike and 18% of occasional riders did (Figure 12).

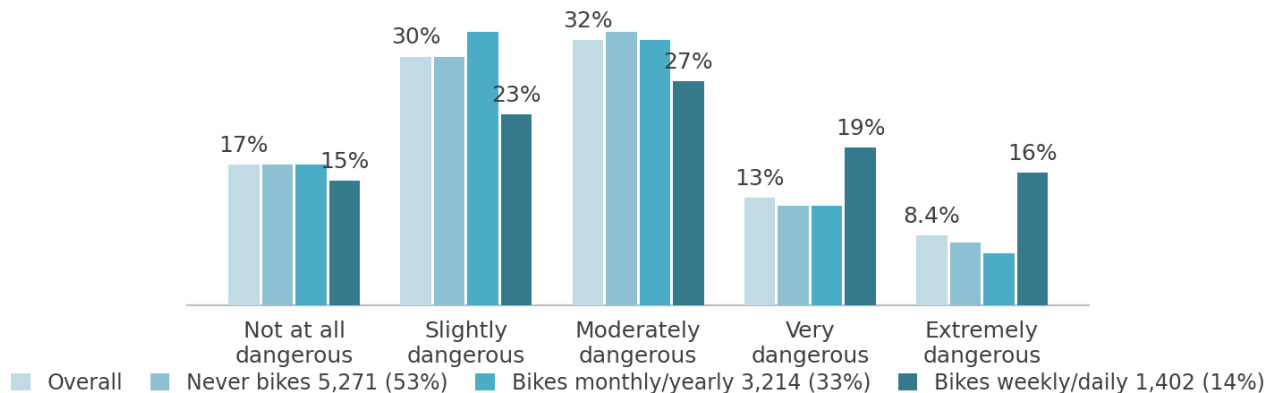


Figure 12. Perceived Danger of Driving a Motor Vehicle on Public Roads by Bicycling Frequency

When it comes to riding a bicycle on public roads, the relationship between bicycling exposure and perceived risk is not monotonic. Occasional riders rate bicycling on public roads least dangerous (30% very or extremely dangerous), while people who never bike (41%) and weekly and daily riders (45%) both rate it higher (Figure 13).

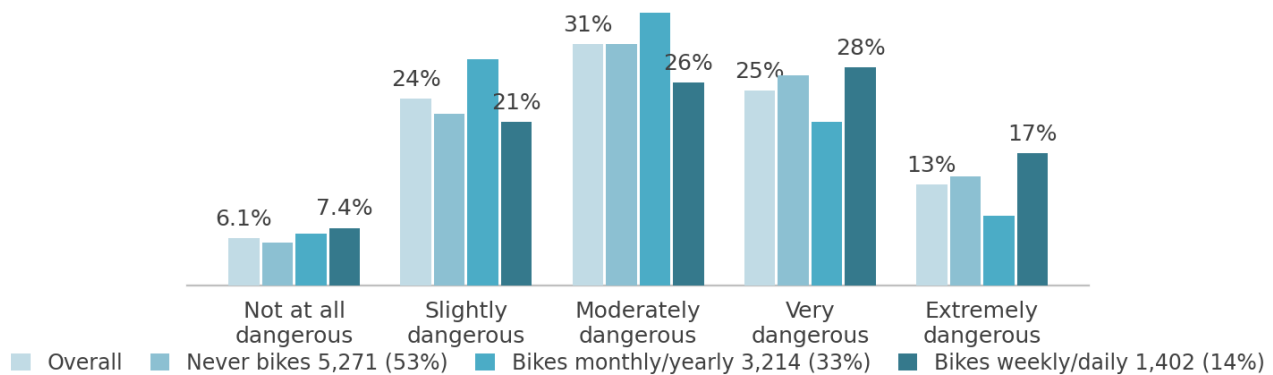


Figure 13. Perceived Danger of Riding a Bicycle on Public Roads by Bicycling Frequency

When traveling as a bicyclist or pedestrian (as opposed to a driver), frequent bicyclist report slightly elevated safety concerns across all topics, however the differences are generally within the margin of error for the same compared to other groups. This is the clearest evidence that the attitudinal gaps are not driven by perceived differential exposure to hazardous conditions while bicycling. All three groups encounter the same street level problems at roughly the same rates (Figure 14). What differs is how much weight they assign to those problems when asked to quantify risks, and how they behave when they are the ones driving.

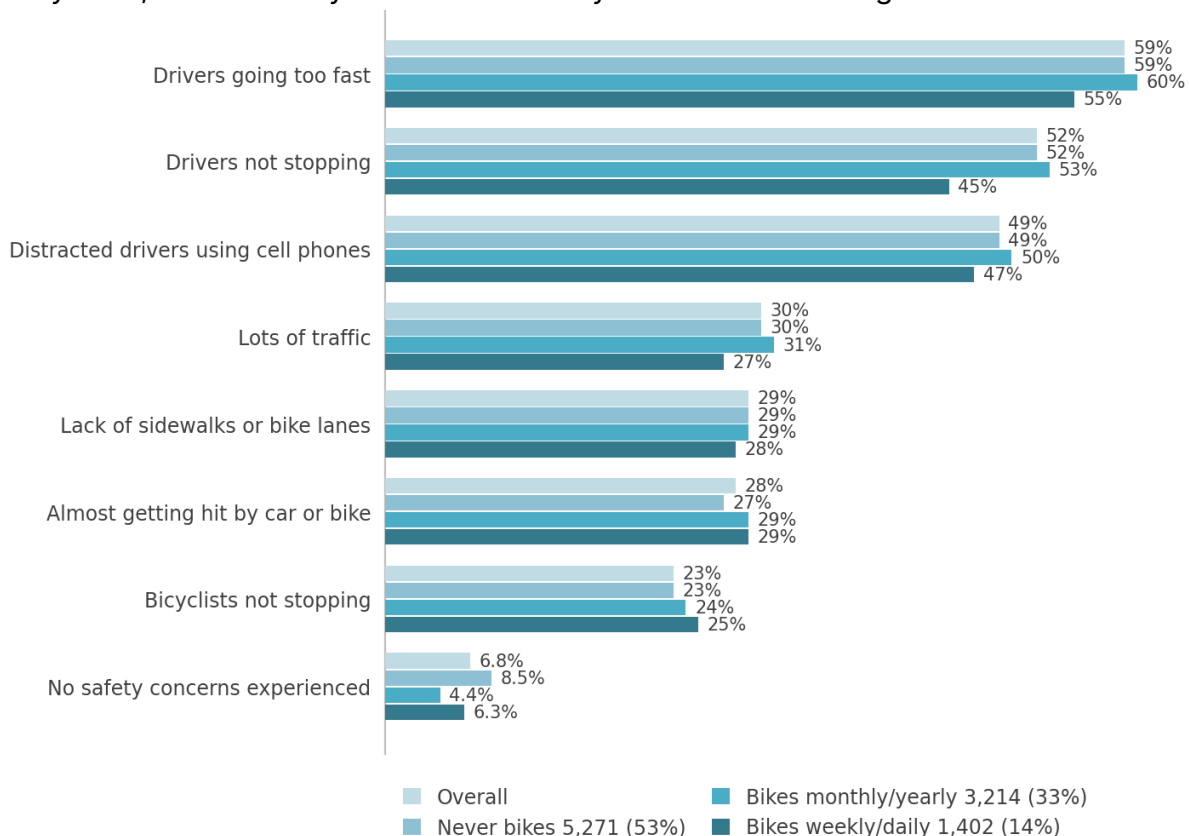


Figure 14. Safety Concerns Experienced as a Pedestrian or Bicyclist by Bicycling Frequency

2.4. Bicyclists and the Built Environment

When asked if it is legal to bike in the roadway when no bike lane is present, bicyclists revealed that they are more knowledgeable about the traffic laws around bicycling than respondents who never bike, and knowledge appears to increase with exposure to bicycling. Sixty-six percent of weekly and daily riders correctly identify that bicyclists may legally ride on roadways where no bike lane is present, compared with 55% of people who never bike. Put another way, 45% of the largest group in the sample, and the group that shares the road with cyclists exclusively from behind the wheel, does not know that riding in the travel lane is lawful.

Drivers who experience bicycling are generally more comfortable with driving around bicyclists. When a bike lane is present, 43% of frequent riders while driving are very comfortable sharing the road with bicyclists, compared with only 27% of people who never bike. Inversely, those who never bicycle reported the highest levels of discomfort with sharing the road (**Figure 15**).

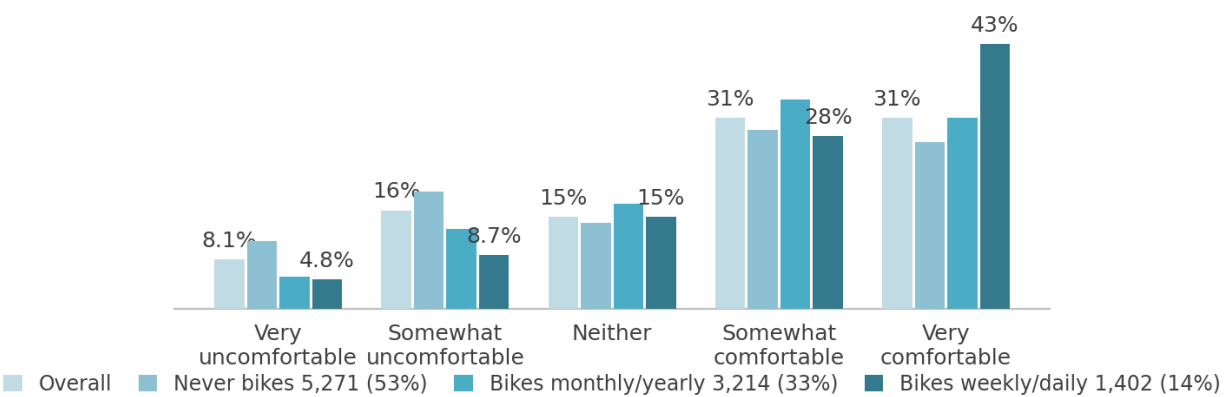


Figure 15. When Driving, Comfort Sharing the Road With Bicyclists When There Is a Bike Lane by Bicycling Frequency

People who never bike are also the most likely to say a protected bike lane divider is the condition under which they would feel most comfortable (60% vs. 49% among frequent riders) and more than twice as likely to say they would be uncomfortable under any circumstance (6.5% vs. 2.9%) (**Figure 16**). Frequent and occasional riders respond similarly and are more willing to accept painted lanes or no lane at all.

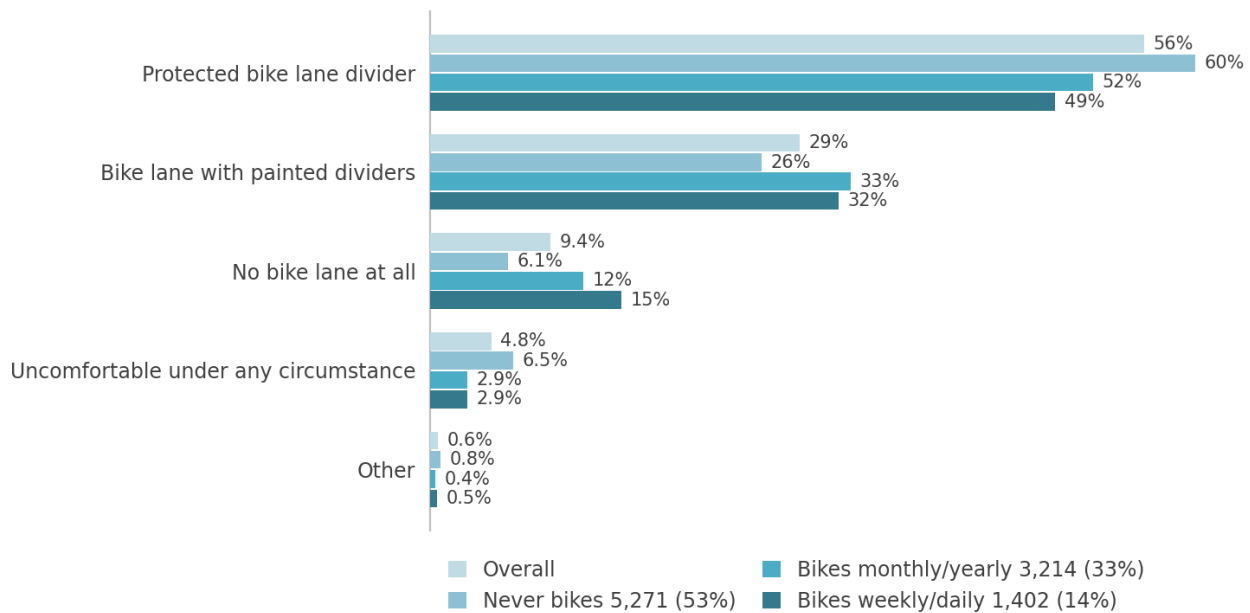


Figure 16. For Drivers, Comfort Sharing the Road With Bicyclists by Bike Lane Context and Bicyclist Frequency

Examined in concert, these two questions about bike lane infrastructure suggest that while drivers generally feel uncomfortable with sharing the road with bicyclists even when there is a bike lane, a protected bike lane is the scenario where they are most comfortable sharing the road.

Chapter 3. Public Awareness of Traffic Safety Campaigns

As with previous years, the 2026 California Traffic Safety Survey asked respondents whether they had seen or heard each of four Office of Traffic Safety campaigns, and how they heard about them. The larger survey sample in 2026 allows for additional analysis compared to previous years, including stratifying by age group and gender, and exploring results by county.

Overall weighted recall was highest for “Don’t Be the ‘I’ in DUI” at 35.1%, followed by “Go Safely California” at 33.3% and “Slow the Fast Down” at 28.2%. The “Empty Chair Club”, appearing in the survey for the first time, was recalled by 14.4% of respondents.

Notably, compared to previous survey years, “Distracted Driving Kills,” which had been the most recalled campaign in both 2024 and 2025 at roughly 54%, was not carried forward into 2026, and the “Empty Chair Club” was added in its place. The three campaigns that do carry forward all show modest gains over their 2025 values: “Go Safely California” rose from 31.5% to 33.3%, “Slow the Fast Down” from 25.2% to 28.2%, and “Don’t Be the ‘I’ in DUI” from 33.3% to 35.1%.

The four campaigns differ in age, reach, and media strategy, and those differences impact nearly every finding in this section.

“Go Safely California” launched in December 2018 as a statewide umbrella brand designed to encourage safe driving habits for all road users in California through a Safe System approach.

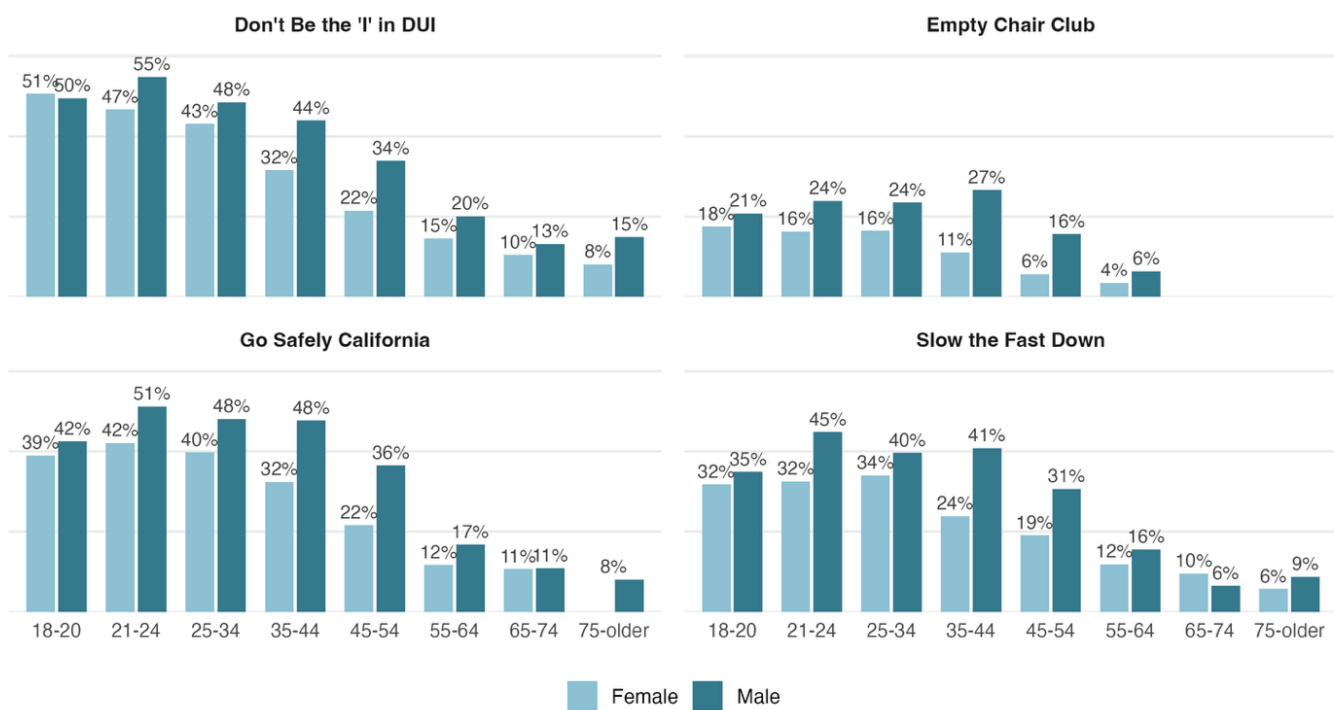
“Slow the Fast Down” launched in July 2022 as an anti-speeding campaign carried on digital platforms, social media, streaming and gaming services, radio, broadcast, and outdoor billboards, and has been reissued annually since.

“Don’t Be the ‘I’ in DUI” is a seasonal impaired driving campaign announced in Fresno and timed to the year-end period, running videos in English and Spanish on digital platforms, audio on radio and streaming services, and digital billboards.

The “Empty Chair Club” is the newest and the most unique. It launched in downtown Los Angeles in November 2025 on World Day of Remembrance for Traffic Victims, in partnership with the Emily Shane Foundation, Streets Are for Everyone, and the Auto Club of Southern California, and was anchored by an art installation of 711 chairs representing every person killed in a traffic crash in Los Angeles County over the preceding year.

3.1. Campaign Recall by Age and Gender

Campaign recall falls steeply and consistently with age. A similar pattern is observed for all campaigns. For “Don’t Be the ‘I’ in DUI”, recall runs above 50% among adults aged 18 to 24 and declines to between 8% and 15% among adults 75 and older, a gap of roughly four to one across the age range (**Figure 17**). “Go Safely California” and “Slow the Fast Down” follow a similar progression and scale of reach. The “Empty Chair Club” declines from roughly one in five young adults to a level at which the oldest cells can no longer be estimated.



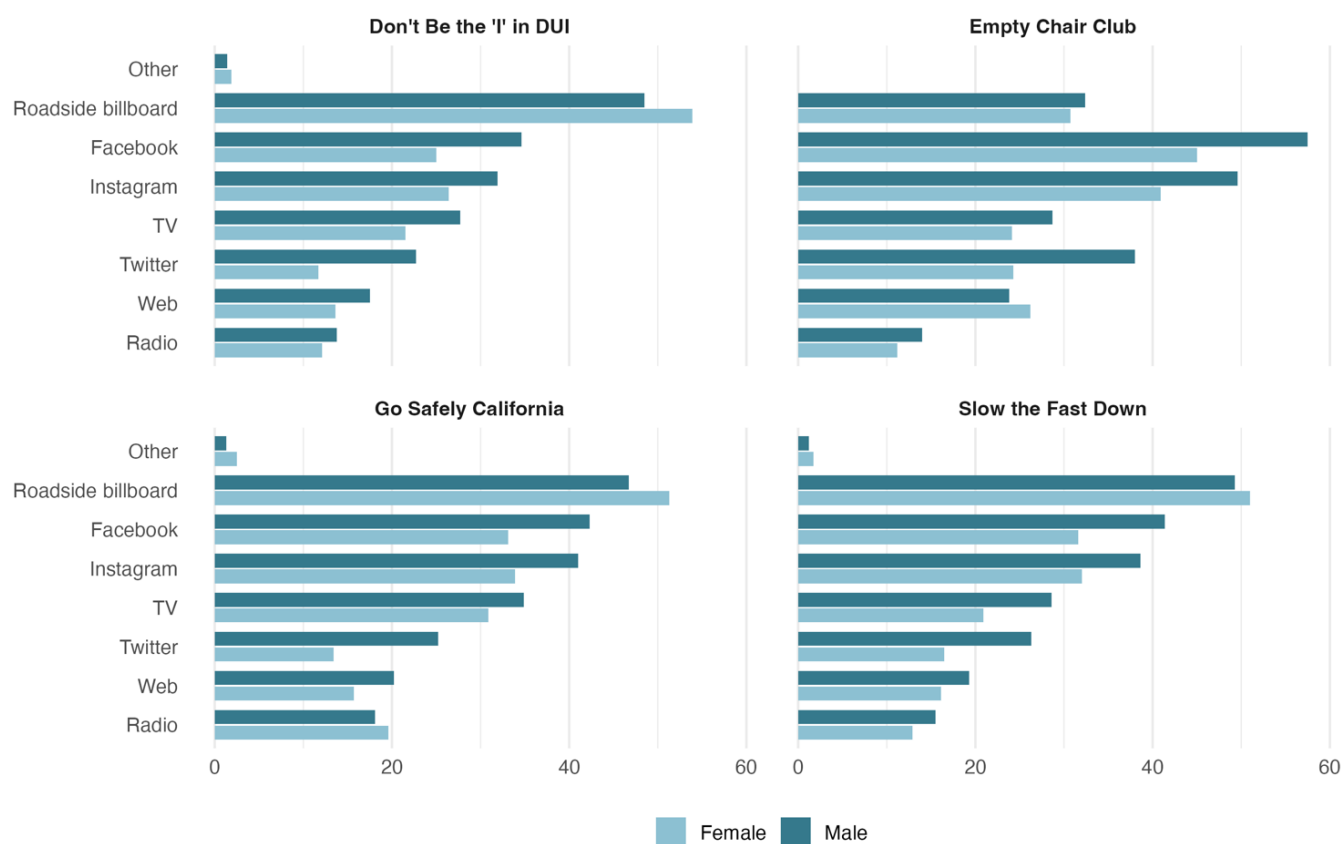
Bars are omitted where the cell has fewer than 30 respondents, or fewer than 10 in either the numerator or its complement.

Figure 17. Recall of Office of Traffic Safety Campaign by Age and Gender

Men report higher recall than women for every campaign in almost every age band. The gap is narrow among the youngest respondents and widens through middle age. For “Don’t Be the ‘I’ in DUI”, recall is effectively identical at ages 18 to 20 (51% of women, 50% of men) but reaches 32% versus 44% at ages 35 to 44 and 22% versus 34% at ages 45 to 54. The “Empty Chair Club” shows the widest proportional gap of the four: among adults aged 35 to 44, 11% of women and 27% of men recall it, and among adults 45 to 54 the figures are 6% and 16% (**Figure 17**).

3.2. How Respondents Encountered the Campaigns

Among respondents who recalled a campaign, roadside billboards is the single most cited source for three of the four campaigns, named by roughly half for “Don’t Be the ‘I’ in DUI”, “Go Safely California”, and “Slow the Fast Down” (**Figure 18**). Roadside billboards is also the only channel for which women match or exceed men. Across all four campaigns, women cite billboards at rates equal to or slightly above men, while men report higher rates on every social and broadcast channel, with the largest differences on Twitter and Facebook. It is not clear if the observed gender gap is driven by respondent observation or micro-targeting of advertising on social media platforms.



Among respondents who recalled the campaign. Percent of cases, so columns sum above 100.

Figure 18. Office of Traffic Safety Campaign Recall by Gender Among Those Who Recalled It

The channel mix shifts sharply with age, and in a direction that is uniform across campaigns (**Figure 19**). Social platform engagement falls away steeply. For “Don’t Be the ‘I’ in DUI” for example, Instagram is named by 33% of recallers aged 18 to 24 and only 9% of those aged 55 to 64, and Facebook falls from 41% at ages 35 to 44 to 16% at 55 to 64. Television moves in the opposite direction, rising from 19% among the youngest recallers to 35% among the oldest.

Radio rises modestly. Roadside billboards are close to flat across the entire age range, varying only between 46% and 58%. Billboards are the only channel in these data that delivers comparable reach across both age and gender.

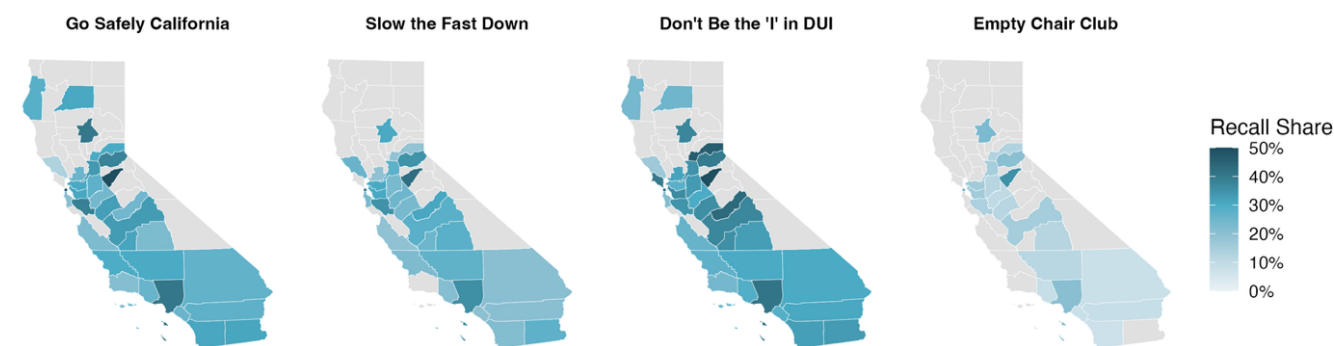


Figure 19. Office of Traffic Safety Campaign Recall by Age Group Among Those Who Recalled It

The “Empty Chair Club” campaign is an exception. It is the only campaign for which billboards are not the leading channel (Figure 3). Unlike the other three campaigns, the “Empty Chair Club” was launched through advocacy organizations around a single physical event and its diffusion pattern may reflect that unique approach.

3.3. Geographic Variation in Campaign Recall

County level estimates are reported for the 33 counties that meet the minimum reporting threshold (n>=30) (Figure 20). Within the counties that can be estimated, recall varies more than twofold. Los Angeles and San Francisco sit near the top for all four campaigns, and the large Southern California counties outside Los Angeles sit consistently below the state average.



Weighted share of respondents recalling each campaign, on a common 0 to 50% scale. Counties in grey have fewer than 30 respondents and are not estimated.

Figure 20. Share of Respondents Who Recalled Each Campaign by County

Because overall recall might vary by county for reasons unrelated to any single campaign (e.g. age structure, media market boundaries, and commute behavior), a more informative comparison might be within counties but across campaigns. “Go Safely California” serves as a useful baseline here, since it is the oldest of the four. Counties where a specific campaign outperforms the local level set by “Go Safely California” are counties where that campaign reached beyond the general level of message awareness.

3.4. The “Empty Chair Club” and the Los Angeles Launch

“Empty Chair Club” recall is distinctively higher in Los Angeles County (20.3%) than other nearby areas. In the five neighboring Southern California counties, campaign recall is much lower San Diego (7.3%), Orange (8.0%), San Bernardino (8.0%), Riverside (8.8%), and Ventura (8.8%) (Figure 21).

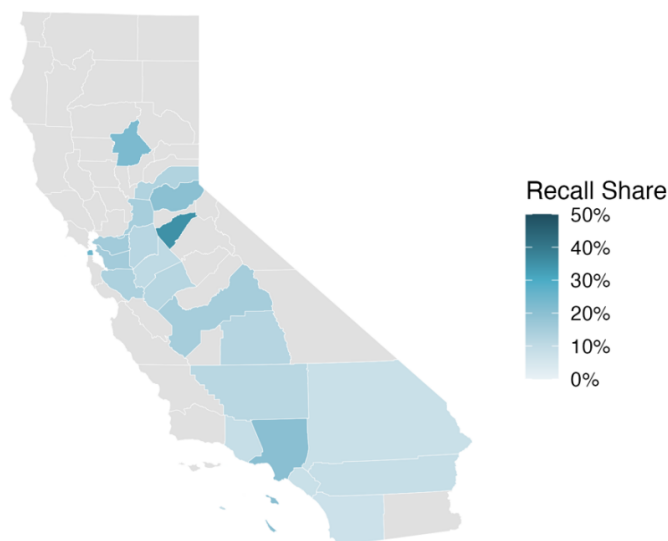


Figure 21. Share of Respondents Who Recalled the "Empty Chair Club" Campaign by County

The campaign launched in downtown Los Angeles in late 2025 with an installation of 711 chairs representing traffic deaths in Los Angeles County specifically, and it attracted local television coverage. The recall pattern maps onto that launch almost exactly. It is the strongest evidence in the survey that a single, physically located, media covered event can produce measurable awareness within its media market, and equally strong evidence that such an event does not diffuse across the state on its own. Butte County at 22.8% and San Francisco at 25.2% are the only other counties approaching the Los Angeles recall level, and both are counties with generally elevated recall across all four campaigns. If the “Empty Chair Club” is designed as a Los Angeles County initiative, a 20% recall rate in its first year is a reasonable result. If it is intended to operate statewide, the results indicate it has not yet done so.

3.5. Counties with Consistently Low Recall

Sonoma County records the lowest recall in the state for both “Go Safely California” (13.4%) and “Don’t Be the ‘I’ in DUI” (16.6%), roughly half the statewide average in each case. San Mateo County is similarly low across the board despite sitting between two of the highest recall counties in the state, San Francisco and Santa Clara. Neither result has an obvious explanation in campaign placement, and both rest on samples small enough that a single unusual draw could produce them. We feel that they are worth flagging for the 2027 wave rather than interpreting now. If the same counties return the same result on a second independent sample, that might warrant further examination.

Chapter 4. Public Consensus on Roadway Risk and Willingness to Intervene

The 2026 California Traffic Safety Survey asked respondents how dangerous they consider a range of roadway behaviors and activities (Q15), how comfortable they would feel intervening in four unsafe situations (Q6), and how often they had actually intervened in the past 30 days (Q5). The larger 2026 sample makes it possible to report these items by age group and gender, which was not practical in prior waves.

4.1. Willingness to Intervene Exceeds Reported Action

Across all four unsafe bystander situations measured, the share of Californians who say they would feel comfortable intervening exceeds the share who report having done so in the past 30 days, by 22-32 percentage points (Figure 22).

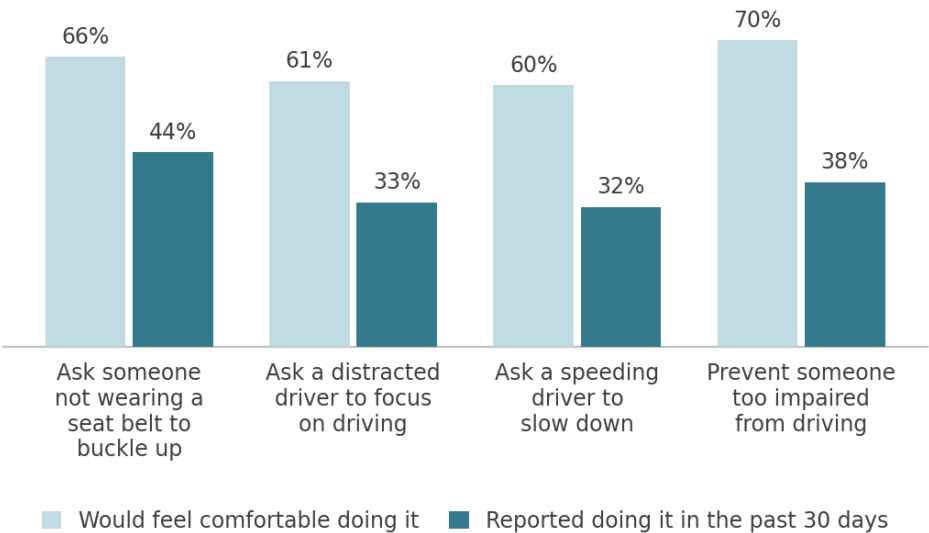


Figure 22. Share of Respondents Reporting They Usually or Always Are Comfortable Intervening to Correct Unsafe Actions Compared to The Share of Respondents Who Reported Taking Action in The Past 30 Days

Seventy percent of Californians say they would usually or always feel comfortable preventing someone too impaired from driving, while 38% report having done so. For asking a distracted driver to focus on the road the gap is similar (61% vs 33%), as is asking a speeding driver to slow down (60% vs 32%) and asking an unbelted passenger to buckle up (66% vs 44%). The gap is widest for the impaired driving situation and narrowest for the seat belt situation, which is also the behavior with the highest reported action of the four.

It is important to note in comparing these questions that, while all respondents may be asked how they would act in a hypothetical situation ("Would feel comfortable doing it"), only a subset of the surveyed population has actually encountered a situation where they could act ("Reported doing it in the past 30 days"). This is a limitation in the way the survey questions are written and comparisons between these questions should include that consideration.

4.2. Comfort Rises with Age While Reported Action Falls

Comfort and reported action move in opposite directions across the age range. Comfort preventing an impaired driver rises steadily from 63% among adults aged 18 to 20 to 81% among adults 75 and older, while reported action on the same item falls from 41% to 17% (Figure 23). The gap between the two therefore widens from roughly 22 points among the youngest adults to 64 points among the oldest.

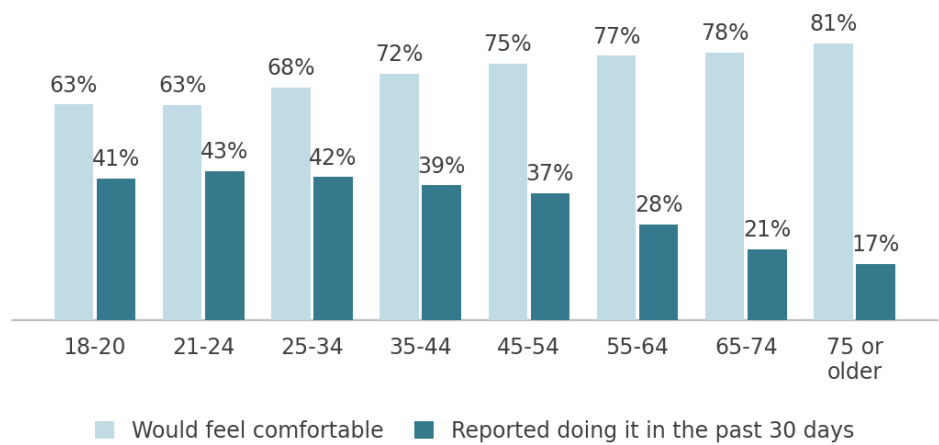


Figure 23. Share of Respondents Reporting They Usually or Always Are Comfortable Intervening to Prevent Someone too Impaired From Driving Compared to the Share of Respondents Who Reported Taking Action in the Past 30 Days, by Age Group

The same pattern holds for the other three situations. Comfort asking an unbelted passenger to buckle up rises from 61% to 76% across the age range while reported action falls from 51% to 22%. The exposure explanation appears more plausible than a decline in willingness, since older respondents in this survey also report lower frequencies of driving, walking, and passenger travel, and therefore fewer occasions on which any of these situations could arise.

Notably, younger adults both are likely more often in one of the surveyed unsafe situations where they could act and report somewhat lower comfort in doing so. Older adults report high comfort in taking actions to address unsafe conditions but may encounter those situations less often compared to younger adults.

4.3. Perceived Danger Across Behaviors and Modes

Perceived danger varies widely across the six items in Q15, and one stands well above the rest (Figure 24). Most Californians, 55%, rate driving 10 miles per hour over the limit on residential streets as very or extremely dangerous. No other item reaches a majority among respondents. Regarding residential speeding and local speed management, this indicates a public that has largely already been persuaded of the underlying premise. In general, there is a perception that the safety of mode choices varies considerably. Riding a bicycle on public roads is rated very or extremely dangerous by 38% and walking or jogging by 36%, while driving a motor vehicle is rated so by 22% and using public transportation by 15%.

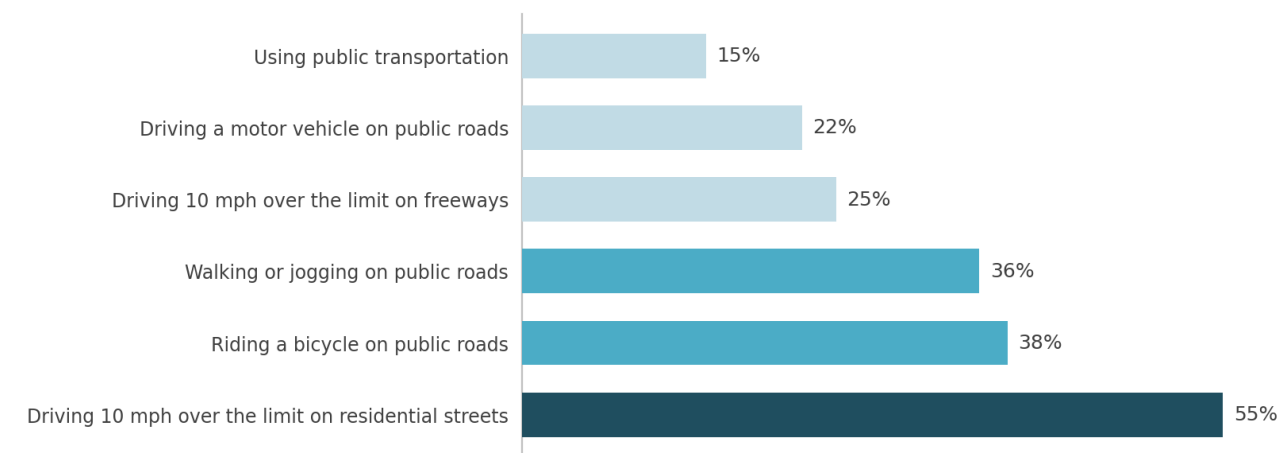


Figure 24. Share of Respondents Rating Each Unsafe Behavior or Activity as Either Very or Extremely Dangerous

The contrast between responses to speeding on residential streets vs freeways is also notable. Driving 10 miles per hour over the limit, is rated very or extremely dangerous by 55% of Californians on residential streets and by 25% on freeways, a ratio of more than two to one (Figure 25). The gap holds across every age group and widens among older respondents: among adults 75 and older, 69% rate residential speeding as very or extremely dangerous against 14% for freeway speeding. Californians appear to consider the perceived danger of speeding to be context dependent. Concern is strongly attached to the residential context and much weaker on freeways.

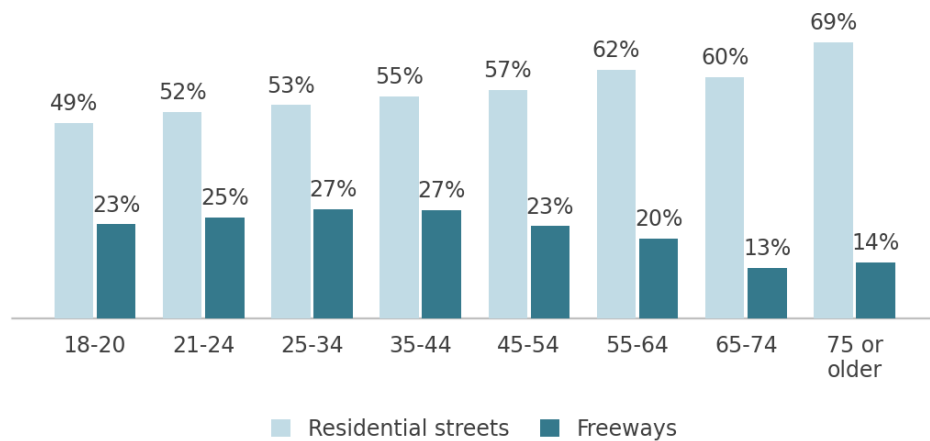


Figure 25. Share of Respondents Rating Driving 10 mph Over the Limit as Very or Extremely Dangerous, by Road Type and Age Group

4.4. Gender Differences in Comfort and Perceived Danger

Women report higher comfort intervening than men in all four situations considered, by 4 to 8 percentage points (**Figure 26**). The largest differences are on asking a speeding driver to slow down (64% of women against 56% of men) and asking an unbelted passenger to buckle up (71% vs 64%). Reported action does not follow the same pattern. Men report marginally more action than women on three of the four situations, including preventing an impaired driver (39% vs 35%), and women lead only on seat belt reminders (44% vs 43%) but that is within the margin of error of the study.

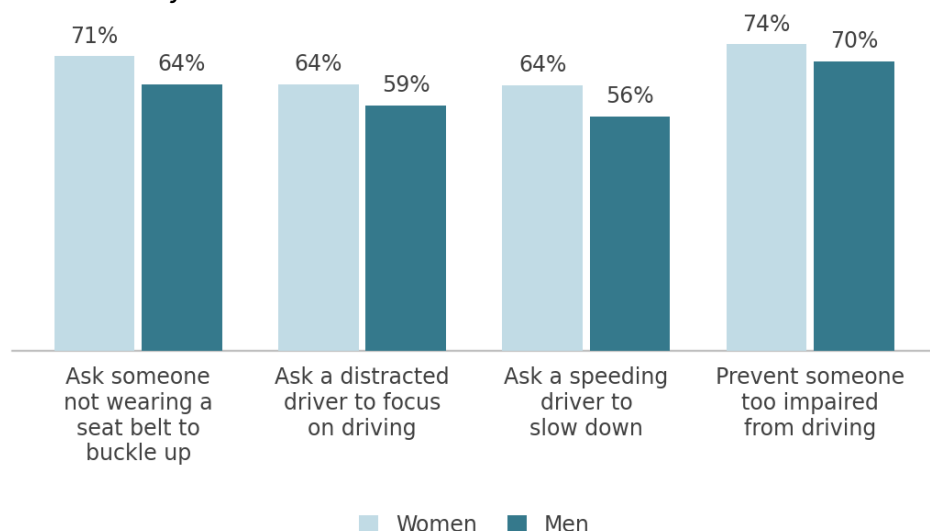


Figure 26. Share of Respondents Reported They Are Usually or Always Comfortable Intervening to Prevent an Unsafe Action, by Gender

The perceived danger items divide along a different line (**Figure 27**). Women rate the non-vehicle occupant as more dangerous than men do: riding a bicycle on public roads (42% of women reported very or extremely dangerous vs only 32% of men), walking or jogging on public roads (37% vs 31%), and driving over the limit on residential streets (60% vs 54%). On freeway speeding the two are effectively identical (22% and 23%).

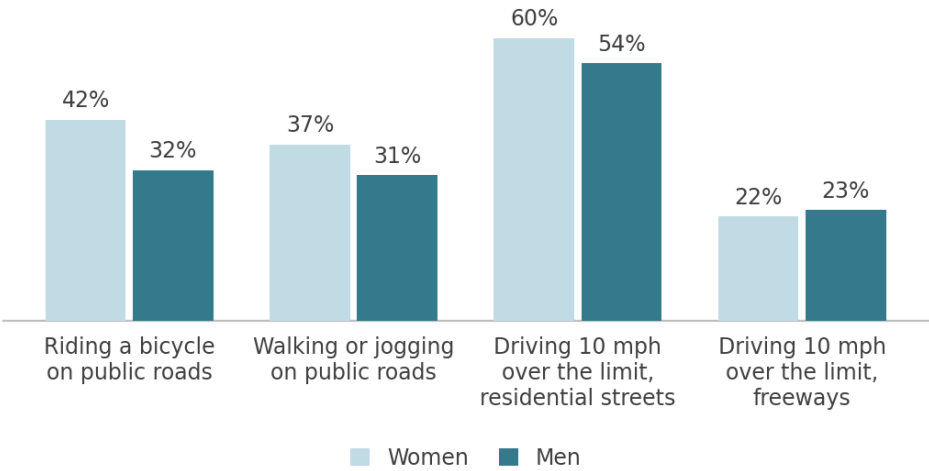


Figure 27. Share of Respondents Rating Each Behavior Very or Extremely Dangerous, by Gender