SANDAG

infobits

2020 State of the Commute Report

May 2021

TransNet is the half-cent sales tax for local transportation projects that was first approved by voters in 1988, and extended in 2004 for another 40 years. The funding collected through *TransNet* have been distributed to local agency grants; environmental projects; and highway, transit, and bikeway projects. The *TransNet* Ordinance states that one of the responsibilities of the Independent TransNet Oversight Committee (ITOC) is: "On an annual basis, review ongoing SANDAG system performance evaluations, including SANDAG's 'State of the Commute' report, and provide an independent analysis of information included in that report. This evaluation process is expected to include such factors as level of service measurements by roadway segment and by time of day, throughput in major travel corridors, and travel time comparisons by mode between major trip origins and destinations. Such information will be used as a tool in the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) development process."

This 13th annual 2020 State of the Commute report fulfills this mandate in the *TransNet* ordinance. The pandemic and stay home order issued on March 19, 2020, had a significant impact on society, including how people traveled across the region. As described in this InfoBits report, the number of vehicle miles traveled on our highways, highway and transit commute times, and transit ridership were all down significantly in 2020, similar to other large cities across the nation, but bicycle ridership was up. As the pandemic continues in 2021, SANDAG will continue to monitor these data trends in partnership with the *TransNet* Independent Taxpayer Oversight Committee.

Summary

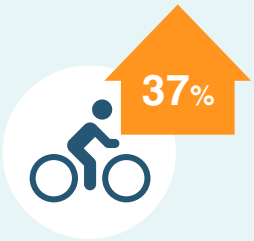
Overall 2020 Commute Trends

Peak period highway travel was **down -16.7%**

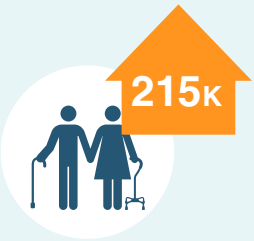
Highway travel times on all **25 major commute corridors** were down

Transit travel times were **down on 14 of the 16 routes**

Ridership on transit in 2020 **dropped considerably (-59%)**, from 2019



Bike activity across eight bike routes **increased 37%**

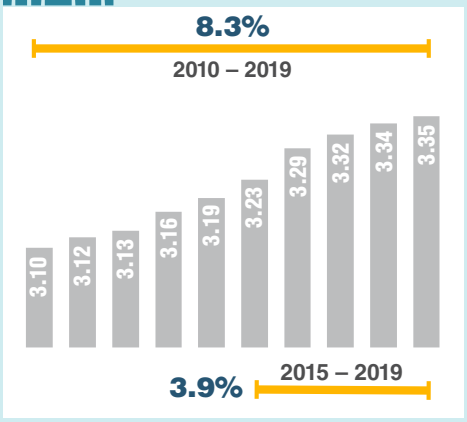


215,000 one way passenger trips through the Senior Mini Grant program

Regional Transportation Performance

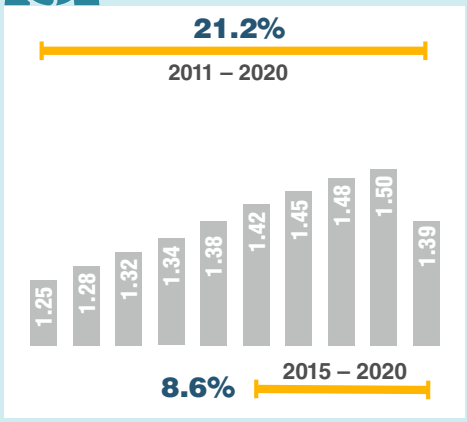
This report provides a high-level summary of performance trends for the regional transportation system in 2020, including highway and transit use and travel times, as well as transit performance. Before the transportation performance data are presented, it is helpful to consider how the region has changed during the past ten years in terms of population, employment, and gross domestic product. As Figures 1 through 3 show, since 2010, the region's population has grown 8.3% (through 2019, the most recent SANDAG estimate available) and the gross domestic product has grown 50.1%. Employment numbers have grown 21.2%, between 2011 and 2020, but dropped by 7.8% from 2019 to 2020, as has been described in other recent SANDAG reports.

Figure 1
population
in millions



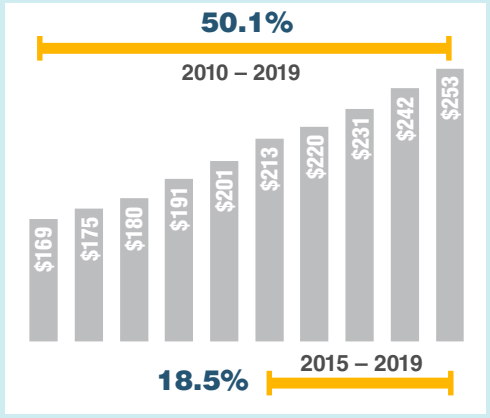
Source: Population Estimates, SANDAG

Figure 2
employment
in millions



Source: California Employment Development Department

Figure 3
gross domestic product
in billions of dollars

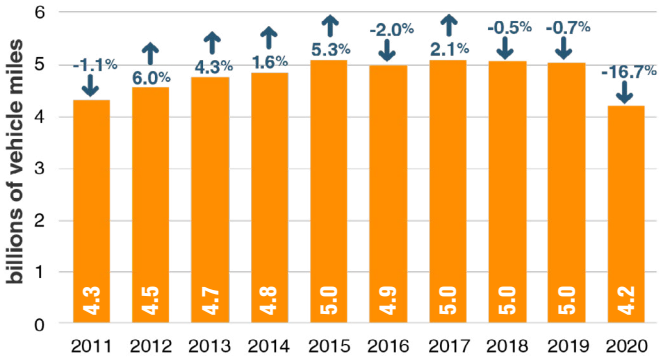


Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis

NOTE: 2020 data for Figures 1 and 3 were not available at the time this InfoBits report was produced.

Travel on the regional highways during peak periods* fell for the third year in a row, with a dramatic decrease (-16.7%) in 2020, to just over 4.2 billion vehicle miles, as would be expected due to changes in travel patterns as a result of the pandemic (Figure 4).

Figure 4
Peak Period Highway Travel



NEW

TransNet funds specialized transportation services for seniors age 60 and older through the Senior Mini Grant program. In 2020, SANDAG provided approximately $1.4 million to grantees who were able to use this funding to leverage other resources and as a result, provide around 215,000 one-way passenger trips. The demand for more funding has grown as measured by the increase in the senior population in our region, the number of grant applications from organizations to provide senior transportation services, and the increase in volume of rides provided.

*Peak periods are weekdays from 6–10 a.m. and from 3–7 p.m.
Source: Performance Measurement System (PeMS), Caltrans

2020

Highway and transit travel times on major commute corridors

As this map shows, all 25 highway corridors had a decrease in travel times from 2019 to 2020 (ranging from 2 to 30 minutes).

For the 16 transit routes with data for both 2019 and 2020, 2 had no change, and 14 decreased (ranging from 1 to 35 minutes).

Consistent with the decrease in highway commute times, bus commute times decreased to a greater degree than rail commute times, which is not surprising given the fewer number of vehicles on the road during 2020.

Highway travel

Average highway travel times departing at 8 a.m. and 5 p.m.

Travel times reflect weekday travel on all Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays throughout the calendar year.

Transit travel

Average transit travel times are based on peak period travel times from January to June 2020.

a.m. peak period is 6–9 a.m.

p.m. peak period is 3–6 p.m.

NOTE: The number in parentheses represents the change in minutes from 2019 to 2020. Not applicable (N/A) is shown if route had no data collected in 2020 due to the pandemic.

Source: Highway Travel Times - PeMS, Caltrans;
Transit Travel Times - SANDAG Passenger Counting Program, MTS, NCTD

After an increase from 2018 to 2019, regional transit ridership decreased 59%, from 2019 to 2020, with only 136,000 average weekday boardings in 2020 compared to 335,000 in 2019 (Figure 5). Transit travel also decreased to around 820,000 passenger miles (from 1.73 million in 2019) (Figure 6). The modest growth in ridership and relatively stable service levels (in revenue miles) in recent years, also came to a halt in 2020 (Figure 7) and transit productivity decreased from 3.38 to 1.82 passengers per revenue mile in 2020 (Figure 8). Ridership decreased on all four of the major rail routes from 2019 to 2020 (Table 1). Ridership on all ten major bus routes in the region also decreased in 2020 (Table 2).

Figure 5
Average Weekday Transit Ridership

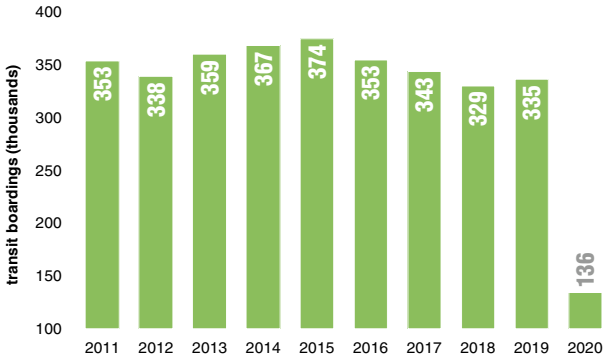


Figure 6
Average Weekday Transit Passenger Miles

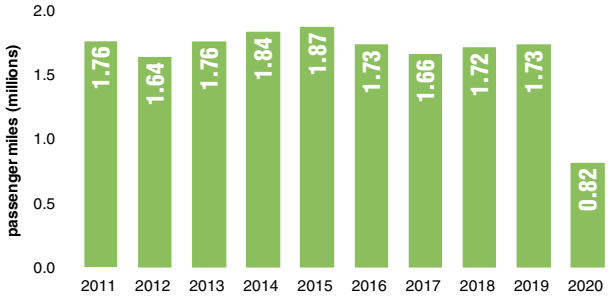


Figure 7
Average Weekday Transit Revenue Miles

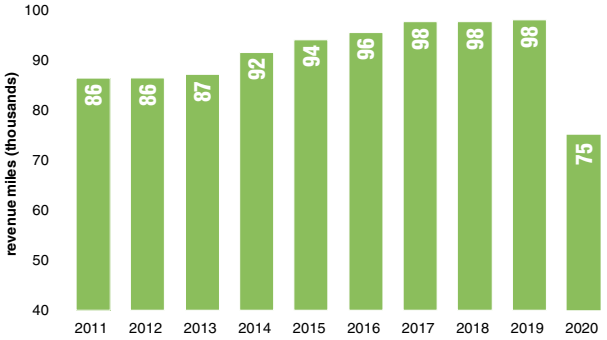


Figure 8
Average Weekday Transit Passengers per Revenue Mile

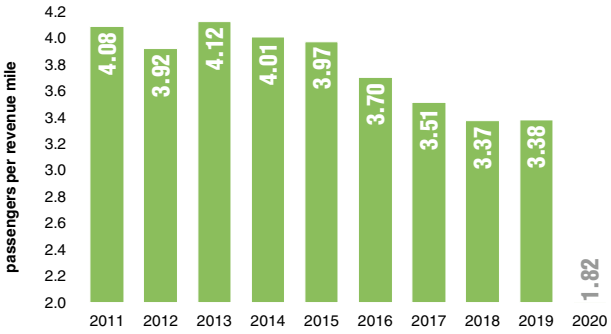


Table 1
Rail Routes by Ridership

2020 Rank	Route	Route Description	Transit Mode	2019 Avg. Daily Passengers	2020 Avg. Daily Passengers
1	UC San Diego Blue Line Trolley	America Plaza to San Ysidro	Light Rail	57,916	24,410
2	Sycuan Green Line Trolley	Santee to Downtown SD / 12th & Imperial via La Mesa / Mission Valley	Light Rail	31,042	11,704
3	Orange Line Trolley	El Cajon to Downtown SD / America Plaza via Southeastern Communities	Light Rail	25,802	11,322
4	SPRINTER	Oceanside to Escondido	Light Rail	8,555	4,844
5	COASTER	Oceanside to Downtown San Diego	Commuter Rail	5,092	N/A

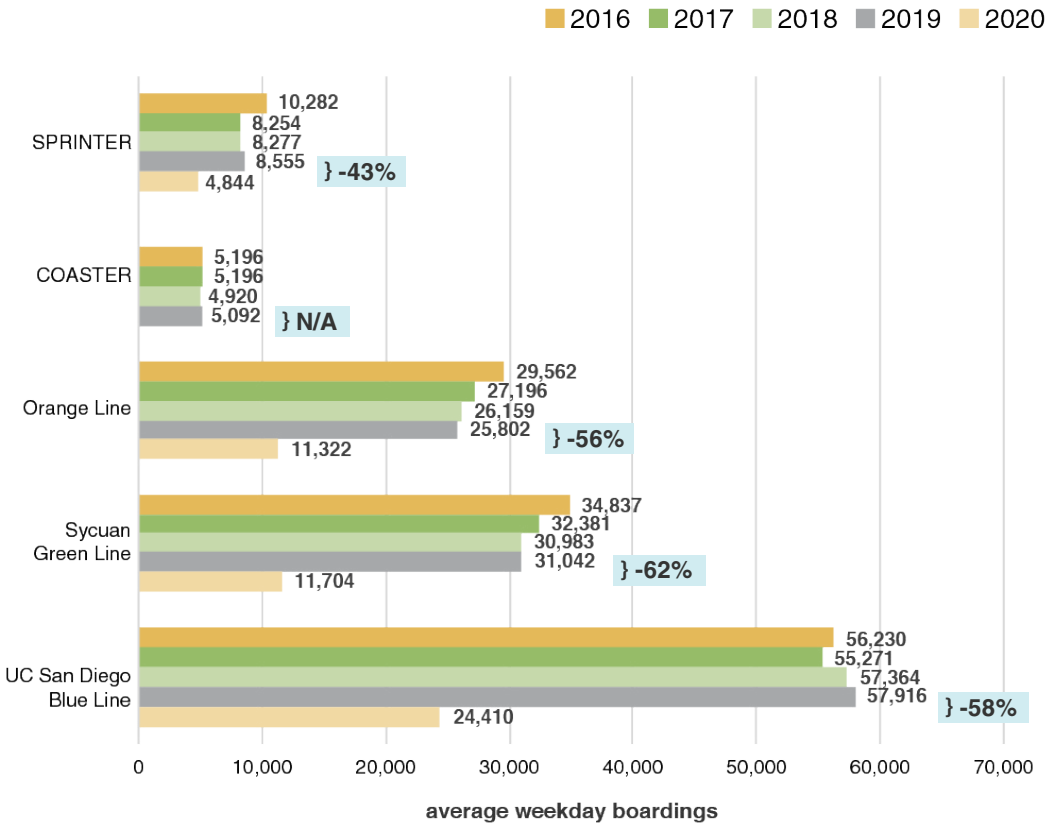
Table 2
Top 10 Bus Routes by Ridership

2020 Rank	Route	Route Description	Transit Mode	2019 Avg. Daily Passengers	2020 Avg. Daily Passengers
1	7	La Mesa to Downtown	Local Bus	6,831	3,126
2	929	Downtown San Diego to Iris Avenue Trolley	Local Bus	7,524	2,957
3	*Rapid* 215	SDSU to Downtown	*Rapid* Bus	6,556	2,679
4	13	Kaiser Hospital / Grantville Trolley to 24th Street Trolley	Local Bus	6,852	2,598
5	3	UCSD Medical Center / Hillcrest to Euclid Trolley	Local Bus	5,924	2,080
6	1	Fashion Valley to La Mesa	Local Bus	4,140	1,795
7	955	SDSU Transit Center to 8th Street Trolley	Local Bus	5,028	1,794
8	10	University & College to Old Town Transit Center	Local Bus	4,131	1,582
9	932	8th Street Trolley to San Ysidro	Local Bus	4,217	1,386
10	30	UTC / VA Medical Center to Downtown	Local Bus	5,581	1,322

Source: SANDAG Passenger Counting Program, MTS, NCTD
NOTE: SPRINTER data represents average weekday ridership between Oct. 2019 - Oct. 2020, and does not provide true impact of COVID on SPRINTER.
NOTE: Average daily passenger data unavailable because no in-person data collection was conducted due to the pandemic.

Figure 9
Regional Rail Transit Ridership

Our region's rail transit experienced large decreases from 2019 to 2020 for the three most frequently used lines (Sycuan Green Line down 62%, UC San Diego Blue Line down 58%, and Orange Line down 56%). The SPRINTER also had a decrease of 43% (Figure 9).

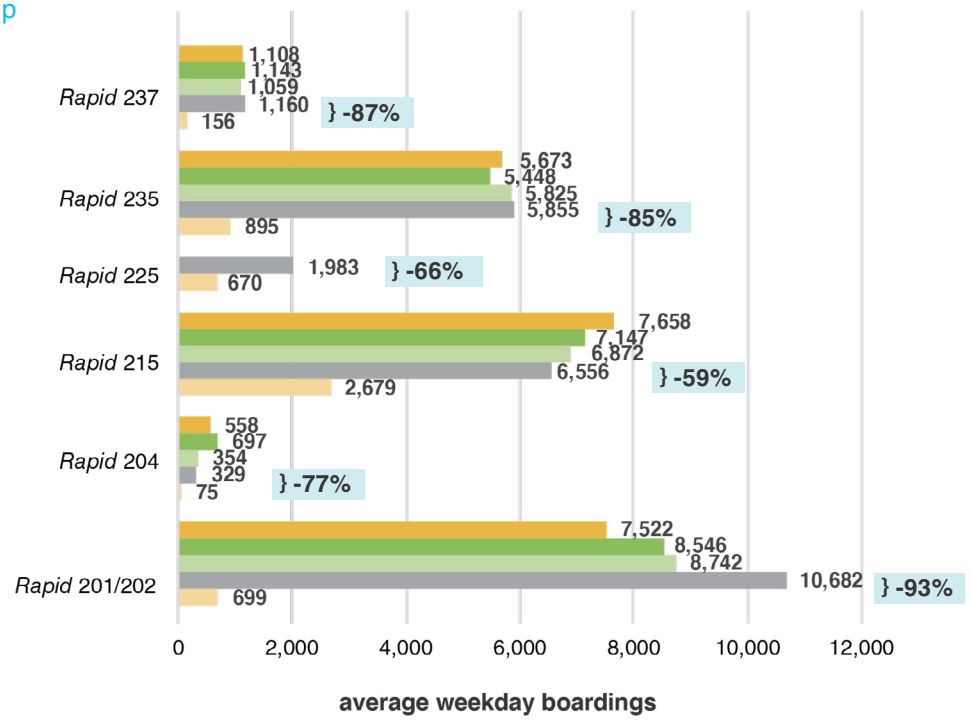


NOTE: Average daily passenger data unavailable for COASTER in 2020 due to COVID-19 pandemic.

NOTE: The UC San Diego Blue Line runs from San Ysidro to America Plaza Downtown, the Sycuan Green Line from Santee to 12th Street and Imperial, and the Orange Line from El Cajon to Courthouse Station Downtown.

Figure 10
Regional Bus Transit Ridership

All six bus routes monitored for this report had significant decreases, ranging from 59% to 93%, with the *Rapid* 201/202 (UTC to UC San Diego) having the most significant drop.



NOTE: The SuperLoop Rapid 201/202 connects the UTC Transit Center to UC San Diego, La Jolla Village Square, and other locations. The SuperLoop Rapid 204 connects the UTC Transit Center to the Nobel Athletic Area and employers east of Genessee. The Rapid 215 connects SDSU to Downtown. The Rapid 225 connects East Palomar Station to Downtown (Rapid 225 began on January 27, 2019, data prior to 2019 were not applicable). The Rapid 235 connects the Escondido Transit Center to Downtown. The Rapid 237 connects Miramar College to UC San Diego via Mira Mesa Boulevard.

Source: SANDAG Passenger Counting Program, MTS, NCTD

In addition to average weekday boardings, two other performance measures for bus transit include the average number of passengers per hour on weekdays (Table 3) and the percent of seats occupied on these bus routes (also known as load factor) (Table 4). As Table 3 shows, the average number of weekday passengers per hours across the six lines varied from 5 (*Rapid* 204 and *Rapid* 237) to 20 (*Rapid* 215), with a total of 63 in 2020, compared to 271 in 2019, a one-year decrease of 77%. Similar to the data presented in Figure 10, the *Rapid* 201/202 saw the largest one-year decrease and the *Rapid* 215 saw the smallest. In terms of percent of seats occupied on these bus routes (Table 4), there was a 62% decrease overall, to 9% occupied in 2020, compared to 24% in 2019. The *Rapid* 201/202 and *Rapid* 204 had the smallest transit load factor in 2020 (both 4%) and the *Rapid* 235 had the highest (18%).

Table 3
Regional Bus Transit Productivity – *TransNet* Program

	2016	2019	2020	1 Year Change	5 Year Change
Rapid 201/202	129	147	15	-90%	-88%
Rapid 204	20	20	5	-75%	-74%
Rapid 215	41	35	20	-44%	-52%
Rapid 225	--	15	8	-46%	--
Rapid 235	31	28	10	-64%	-68%
Rapid 237	22	26	5	-81%	-77%
Total	242	271	63	-77%	-74%

Table 4
Regional Bus Transit Load Factor – *TransNet* Program (All Day)

	2016	2019	2020	1 Year Change	5 Year Change
Rapid 201/202	27%	28%	4%	-85%	-84%
Rapid 204	16%	15%	4%	-71%	-72%
Rapid 215	26%	22%	12%	-46%	-53%
Rapid 225	--	19%	10%	-45%	--
Rapid 235	38%	34%	18%	-47%	-53%
Rapid 237	20%	29%	7%	-75%	-64%
Average	25%	24%	9%	-62%	-63%

Source: SANDAG Passenger Counting Program, MTS, NCTD

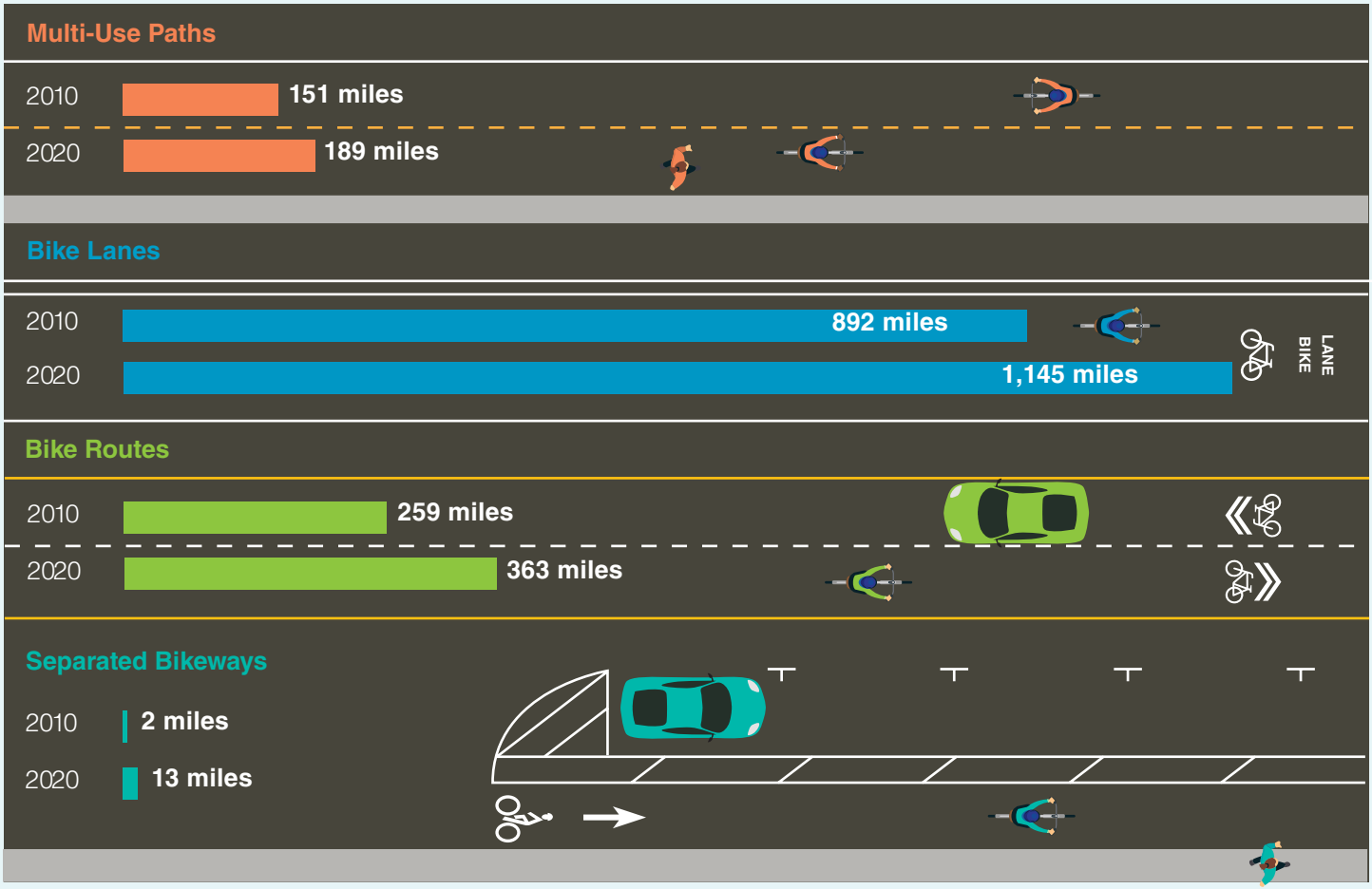
NOTE: The SuperLoop Rapid 201/202 connects the UTC Transit Center to UCSD, La Jolla Village Square, and other locations. The SuperLoop Rapid 204 connects the UTC Transit Center to the Nobel Athletic Area and employers east of Genessee. The Rapid 215 connects SDSU to Downtown. The Rapid 225 connects East Palomar Station to Downtown (Rapid 225 began on January 27, 2019, data prior to 2019 were not applicable). The Rapid 235 connects the Escondido Transit Center to Downtown. The Rapid 237 connects Miramar College to UC San Diego via Mira Mesa Boulevard.

TransNet has also funded key segments of the San Diego Regional Bike Network, with several projects that are in the planning, environmental, or construction phases, which will help improve connectivity throughout the region and create safer and more inviting environments for everyone. With the SANDAG Board of Directors approving the Regional Bike Plan in 2011, SANDAG has focused on providing a diverse system of interconnected bicycle corridors, support facilities, and programs to make biking more practical and desirable to a broader range of people in our region. SANDAG and local agency partners implemented more than 400 miles of bikeways since 2010, often with *TransNet* funds. This is a 31% increase in the total centerline regional bikeways mileage from a 2010 baseline as shown in Figure 11.

There are 4 main bikeway types or "classes" present in the San Diego region, they are codified in the California Vehicle Code 890.4. A Class 1 **Multi-Use Path** provides completely separated right-of-way designated for the exclusive use of bicycles and pedestrians. Class 2 **Bike Lanes** provide a restricted right-of-way designated for the exclusive or semi-exclusive use of bicycles with travel by motor vehicles or pedestrians prohibited. A Class 3 **Bike Route** provides a right-of-way on-street designated by signs or permanent markings and is shared with pedestrians and motorists. The Class 4 **Separated Bikeway** is a hybrid type bicycle facility that combines the experience of a separated path with the on-street infrastructure of a conventional bike lane providing a right-of-way designated exclusively for bicycle travel adjacent to a roadway and separated from vehicular traffic.

NEW

Figure 11
Regional Bikeways Mileage

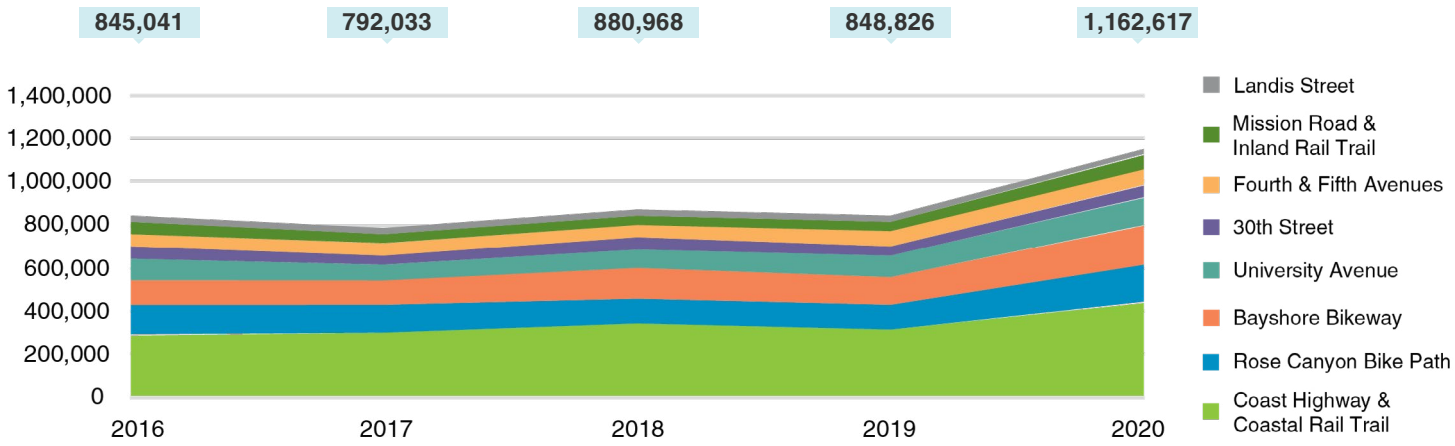


Data across bike routes tracked by SANDAG show an upward trend in the number of bike trips on the Regional Bike Network. In 2020, bike activity counted across the eight routes increased 37% from 2019, likely due in part to people's travel patterns as a result of the pandemic (Figure 12).

NEW

Figure 12

Regional Bike Counts



Source: SANDAG Eco-Counters
NOTE: For more information please see Bike Riding in the San Diego Region Since COVID-19 InfoBits.

About infobits

SANDAG serves as the San Diego region's clearinghouse for information and data. Infobits publish timely, relevant information as well as provide context on complex issues facing the region.

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