



Western Nevada County
Bicycle Transportation & Recreation Survey
Preliminary Findings Report • July 2026

Sierra Express Bicycle Club
of Nevada County
Sierraexpress.org

Western Nevada County

Bicycle Transportation & Recreation Survey

Preliminary Findings Report • July 2026

Overview

The Western Nevada County Bicycle Transportation & Recreation Survey collected 516 responses between late March and July 1, 2026. The survey was distributed through multiple channels and reached a broad cross-section of residents, cyclists and non-cyclists alike. This report summarizes key quantitative findings and dominant themes from open-ended responses.

Who Responded

Where Respondents Live (n=516)

Location	Share
Grass Valley city limits	17%
Nevada City city limits	17%
Penn Valley / Rough & Ready	16%
Other Western Nevada County (unincorporated)	43%
Outside Western Nevada County	8%

The large share from unincorporated areas (43%) is notable — these residents are most exposed to rural roads with no shoulders and no practical alternative to driving.

Age (n=446)

Age Range	Share
Under 26	<1%
26–45	21%
46–65	41%
65 and older	38%

The survey skewed heavily older. People under 45 make up roughly 22% of respondents, which likely underrepresents younger adults and families with school-age children — a demographic that figures prominently in the qualitative responses.

Households with children under 18 (n=446): 21% yes, 79% no.

How Respondents Found the Survey (n=352)

The largest single source was Nextdoor (20%), followed by the Sierra Express Bicycle Club Facebook page (14%) and word of mouth / forwarded links (10%). The "Other" category (41%) was dominated by Facebook — Nevada County Peeps, Grass Valley Peeps, Nevada City Peeps, and similar groups. Additional

sources included BONC Instagram, SFCC email lists, BYLT newsletter, Fit Culture gym flyers, and KVMR radio. The survey was also distributed at Nevada City's Earthfest and the County Recreation Fair.

This distribution matters for interpreting the sample: a significant portion arrived via cycling-affiliated channels, which likely skews responses toward active cyclists and cycling advocates.

Bicycle Use

Do you use a bicycle at all? (n=491): 83% yes, 17% no.

Transportation Use in the Past 30 Days (n=403)

Frequency	Share
Never	37%
1-2 times	18%
3-5 times	18%
6-10 times	13%
11+ times	14%

Almost two-thirds of current cyclists rarely or never use their bike for transportation — a substantial gap between bicycle ownership/occasional use and regular utility cycling.

Recreation/Exercise Use in the Past 30 Days (n=403)

Recreational use is considerably higher than transportation use. About 56% ride often or very often (6+ times per month) for recreation or exercise, compared to 27% for transportation. This reflects the area's strong recreational cycling culture and the relative absence of safe infrastructure for utilitarian trips.

E-bike use (n=403): 32% primarily use an e-bike; 68% do not.

Would an E-Bike Change How Much You Ride? (n=353)

Response	Share
No more than I do now	47%
A little more	20%
Somewhat more	18%
A lot more	12%
Would use it as primary transportation	4%

About half of respondents say e-bike access would increase their riding, suggesting e-bikes represent a real but not transformative opportunity without accompanying infrastructure improvements.

Primary Transportation Modes (n=491, ranked)

Driving ranked first by a wide margin (score 3.86 out of 4). Bicycling and walking ranked roughly equal as secondary modes. Public transit ranked last and was marked N/A by 66% of respondents, reflecting the region's very limited transit service.

Conditions and Safety

Overall Bicycling Conditions Rating (n=467)

Rating	Share
Excellent	4%
Good	14%
Fair	29%
Poor	34%
Very poor	19%

More than half of respondents (53%) rated overall conditions as poor or very poor. Only 18% rated them excellent or good.

Safety on Local Roads (n=467)

Rating	Share
Very safe	2%
Somewhat safe	8%
Neutral	9%
Somewhat unsafe	42%
Very unsafe	39%

This is a striking result: 81% of respondents said they feel somewhat or very unsafe bicycling on local roads. This goes beyond dissatisfied cyclists — it reflects a fundamental barrier to participation.

Ratings of Specific Conditions (n=467)

Rated on a scale from Excellent (1) to Very Poor (5). Higher scores indicate worse ratings.

Condition	% Poor or Very Poor	Weighted Score
Bike lane availability	82%	4.21
Bike lane/shoulder maintenance	77%	4.10
Route connectivity between towns	65%	3.88
Driver behavior around cyclists	40%	3.31
Traffic speeds in residential areas	39%	3.28

Bike lane availability and maintenance are rated worst by far. Driver behavior and traffic speeds, while serious concerns, rate comparatively better — though 40% still rating driver behavior as poor or very poor is far from acceptable.

What Limits Bicycling

Respondents rated 10 factors on how much they limit their bicycling (n=459). Top barriers by “a lot” or “completely” combined:

Barrier	"A lot" or "Completely"
Lack of bike lanes	66%
Lack of connected routes	51%
Driver behavior	43%
Unsafe intersections	42%
Traffic speed	41%

By contrast, hills/terrain (16%), bike parking (13%), fear of theft (18%), weather (10%), and lack of access to a bike (5%) are relatively minor barriers. The data clearly points to infrastructure and driver behavior — not terrain or access — as the primary obstacles.

Support for Improvements

Respondents were asked how strongly they support seven potential improvements (n=450). Sorted by combined “strongly support” + “somewhat support”:

Improvement	Strongly Support	Combined Support
Expanding off-street multi-use paths	83%	91%
Improved bike route connectivity between communities	75%	88%
Adding protected bike lanes, including at busy intersections	74%	87%
Improvements for walking and biking to school	73%	87%
Traffic calming in neighborhoods	49%	71%
Increasing bike parking at businesses	34%	63%
Lowering speed limits	30%	51%

Off-street multi-use paths and improved connectivity between communities are the top priorities. Protected bike lanes and school safety improvements are close behind. Speed limit reductions have the most mixed support — roughly equal proportions somewhat support and are neutral.

Trend

Compared to Two Years Ago, Bicycling Conditions Are (n=450)

Response	Share
Much or somewhat better	14%
About the same	64%
Somewhat or much worse	12%
Not here two years ago / not a cyclist	10%

Most respondents see no change. A small but significant group says things have gotten worse. The sentiment in open-ended responses suggests even those who say “the same” don't mean “good” — they mean conditions remain as inadequate as they've been for years or decades.

Engagement Interest

Would You Be Interested In (n=449, select all that apply)

Option	Share
No involvement at this time	52%
Receiving updates about active transportation improvements	44%
Participating in public meetings	25%
Volunteering for advocacy efforts	15%

152 respondents (29%) provided contact information. The 44% who want updates represents a meaningful list for future outreach, and 25% willing to attend public meetings is a solid base for engagement.

Open-Ended Themes

200 respondents left optional comments (Q20), and 152 responded to Q17. Several consistent themes emerge.

Infrastructure: The Dominant Demand

The most common request, by far, is for separated, off-street paved paths connecting communities — specifically a dedicated route between Grass Valley and Nevada City. Respondents repeatedly cite Tahoe, Truckee, the American River Parkway, and Folsom as models. Several note they currently drive to those places to ride.

Specific corridors mentioned frequently include: Bitney Springs Road, Pleasant Valley Road, Banner Lava Cap Road, Rattlesnake Road, Dog Bar Road/La Barr Meadows, SR-174 from Cedar Ridge, and the Highway 20 crossing at Harmony Market/Five Mile House.

A secondary but significant request is basic shoulder maintenance — cleaning debris, removing overhanging vegetation, and widening existing shoulders. Multiple respondents note that even where shoulders exist, they're often unusable due to accumulated gravel, pine needles, and trash.

Driver Behavior and Safety

Many respondents describe hostile or dangerous encounters with drivers — honking, close passes, verbal harassment, being deliberately buzzed or run off the road. Several have been hit by cars. A number say they have stopped riding on roads entirely because of fear. Respondents compare the situation unfavorably to Sacramento, NYC, Bend, Chicago, Davis, and Santa Cruz — places where, whatever their other challenges, drivers were at least accustomed to sharing the road with cyclists.

There is strong demand for law enforcement involvement: enforcing the 3-foot passing rule, issuing citations for dangerous passing, and training officers on cycling laws. Some respondents suggest allowing bike camera footage to be submitted to law enforcement, as is done in the UK.

Frustration with the Status Quo

A recurring thread — particularly from long-time residents — is exhaustion with the cycle of surveys, plans, and inaction. One respondent cited 35 years of requesting a bike path on the same corridor. Another described this as at least the tenth such survey in 20 years. Whether or not that characterization is accurate, the sentiment is real and worth taking seriously. Credibility depends on demonstrating that this process leads to something.

E-Bike and Trail Use Tensions

A notable minority of respondents expressed concern about e-bikes on non-motorized trails, citing speed differences and impacts on other trail users. This is a distinct conversation from road cycling infrastructure, but it surfaced enough to warrant acknowledgment. There is also a small group who argued that e-bikes should be classified and regulated as motor vehicles.

Voices from Non-Cyclists

The survey reached some respondents who don't cycle, including drivers who shared perspectives on road sharing. A few expressed frustration with cyclist behavior (riding in the middle of lanes, ignoring stop signs). These voices are worth noting — shared-road improvements require building goodwill with drivers, not just cyclists. However, the preponderance of open-ended responses came from people who want to ride but feel it's too dangerous to do so.

Summary

The survey results are internally consistent and point in a clear direction. Safety concerns — particularly the absence of separated infrastructure and hostile driver behavior — are the primary barrier to cycling in Western Nevada County, not terrain, weather, or access to bikes. There is broad, cross-cutting support for off-street multi-use paths and improved connectivity between communities. The demand for a Grass Valley–Nevada City corridor is the single most mentioned specific request in the qualitative data.

The respondent pool skews older and toward existing cyclists and cycling-affiliated organizations. This means results likely reflect motivated cyclists more than casual or potential riders — which, if anything, suggests that baseline safety conditions are even worse than the data shows, since the most deterred potential cyclists may not have participated at all.

152 people provided contact information and are ready to be engaged. The 44% interested in updates represents a substantial community list to build on.