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### Title

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# The Long-term Impacts of the Pandemic on Ridehailing Use Could Have Negative Environmental Impacts

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## Issue

Ridehailing services (such as those offered by Uber and Lyft) can contribute to increases in vehicle miles traveled (VMT) by attracting demand from more sustainable modes, encouraging additional travel, and driving while not serving passengers<sup>1</sup>. Pooled ridehailing services (i.e., ridehailing services that offer discounted fares in exchange for the potential to be matched with other customers traveling to similar destinations) have been identified as a means of addressing the negative impacts of ridehailing services. However, the impact of pooled ridehailing is heavily influenced by the uptake of these services<sup>2</sup>. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic substantially influenced travel mode preferences, resulting in an increased preference for individual modes (e.g., private vehicles and active modes) and a reduced preference for shared modes (e.g., public transit and ridehailing)<sup>3</sup>. Given the disruptive impacts of the pandemic on travel mode preferences, and the negative impacts of ridehailing services during the prepandemic period, it is crucial to understand whether the pandemic will have long-term impacts on ridehailing use. To examine the long-term impacts of the pandemic, we used data from two web-based surveys of California residents to 1) compare ridehailing use during the pre-pandemic (fall 2019) and post-pandemic (fall 2023) periods, and 2) analyze the factors influencing post-pandemic ridehailing use in California.

## Key Research Findings

**The use of ridehailing for commuting trips is more common in the post-pandemic period compared to the pre-pandemic period (see Figure 1).** This likely stems from working-from-home being more common during the post-pandemic period than it was during the pre-pandemic period and the relatively high cost of using ridehailing. This is supported by the results of our analysis, which suggest that respondents who commuted less than three days per week were more likely to consider using ridehailing services for their commute. As certain employers begin implementing return-to-office policies, it is unclear whether this trend will continue. Consequently, planning agencies should monitor ridehailing trip volumes, traffic conditions, and the performance of public transit routes in locations with a high density of jobs (particularly, office jobs) as this information can help identify locations that could benefit from congestion management strategies or transit priority measures.

**Pooled ridehailing services are being used much less often during the post-pandemic period than they were during the pre-pandemic period.** Our results suggest that 47.0% of post-pandemic respondents have never used pooled ridehailing, while another 45.7% did not use these services in the month before the survey. This is consistent with trends observed in New York City and Chicago<sup>4</sup>,

which demonstrate that pooled ridehailing use is much less prevalent during the post-pandemic period than it was during the pre-pandemic period. The difference in the prevalence of pooled ridehailing use could be due to the cancellation of these services at the onset of the pandemic. This result calls into question whether promoting the use of pooled ridehailing will be sufficient to address the negative impacts of ridehailing, and whether people will use pooled automated vehicles if they become commercially available.

**Encouraging the use of pooled ridehailing may not be enough to fully address the negative impacts of ridehailing.** The results of our analysis highlight the relatively low uptake of pooled ridehailing services during the post-pandemic period. Consequently, policymakers should consider alternative strategies to help address the negative impacts of ridehailing services. One example of such a strategy is the implementation of policies that aim to encourage the electrification of ridehailing vehicles, such as the Clean Miles Standard in California. To ensure that policies of this nature have the intended impact, it is crucial to assuage drivers' concerns about access to electric vehicle chargers (particularly in public areas) and help drivers overcome financial barriers to obtaining electric vehicles. However, it is also important to note that electric vehicles still contribute to VMT, which can contribute to congestion and emissions. Additionally, policies aiming to reduce the distance of ridehailing trips (such as encouraging the integration of ridehailing and public transit services) can also help address the negative impacts of ridehailing.

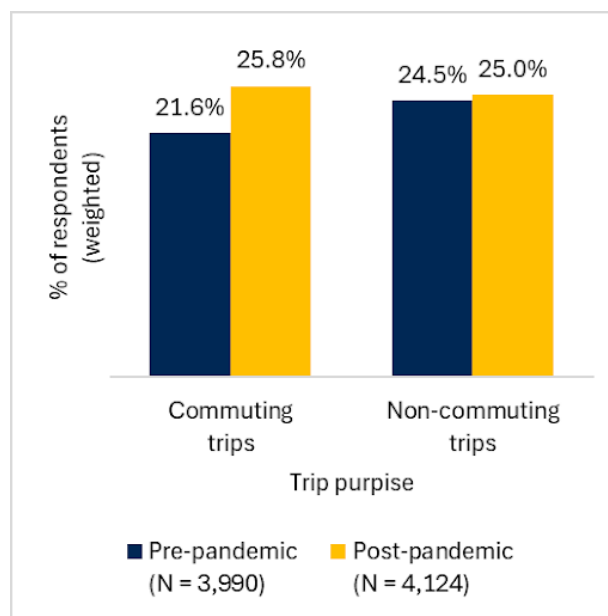


Figure 1. Percentage of respondents using ridehailing, by trip purpose and time period

## More Information

This policy brief is drawn from the open access publication “Examining Post-pandemic Ride-hailing Use in California and its Determinants” prepared by Patrick Loa, Yongsung Lee, and Giovanni Circella with the University of California, Davis. The paper can be found [here](#). For more information about findings presented in this brief, please contact Yongsung Lee at [yshlee@ucdavis.edu](mailto:yshlee@ucdavis.edu).

<sup>1</sup>Tirachini, A. (2020). Ride-hailing, travel behaviour and sustainable mobility: An international review. *Transportation*, 47(4), 2011–2047. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11116-019-10070-2>

<sup>2</sup>Rodier, C., Alemi, F., & Smith, D. (2016). Dynamic Ridesharing: Exploration of Potential for Reduction in Vehicle Miles Traveled. *Transportation Research Record: Journal of the Transportation Research Board*, 2542(1), 120–126. <https://doi.org/10.3141/2542-15>

<sup>3</sup>De Vos, J. (2020). The effect of COVID-19 and subsequent social distancing on travel behavior. *Transportation Research Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, 5, 100121. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.trip.2020.100121>

<sup>4</sup><https://toddwschneider.com/dashboards/>

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