

Survey finds commuting life not just an Aspen problem

■ More than half of Glenwood's workers live elsewhere

By Robert Ward.
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It's no secret that more than half of Aspen's work force lives outside of town. But the same may well be true for Glenwood Springs.

A new study of regional travel patterns in the Roaring Fork Valley region shows that Glenwood, like Aspen, actually houses only 40 percent of its workers.

"At both ends of the valley we

have the same problem," said Colin Laird of the regional nonprofit Healthy Mountain Communities. "All of those people show up in the morning and leave in the evening, and there is lots of traffic."

Laird and transportation consultant Jim Charlier recently unveiled the preliminary results of a \$50,000 transportation study funded by local governments and a grant from the Governor's Office of Energy Conservation.

While all the numbers aren't in, they are confident that the preliminary numbers paint a fairly accurate picture of commuter behavior in the valley. Surveys were mailed to 200 employers and about 2,500

individuals, and about 450 have been returned so far.

"We've gotten a good response rate so far — about 15 percent — and we're hoping to get it even higher," Laird said Friday.

Generally speaking, the study shows a commuting work force that moves in various directions at different times of day, a picture more complicated than the simple upvalley-downvalley round trip to Aspen.

The wintertime survey, which Laird said should be duplicated in the summer for a more thorough picture, shows about 14 percent of Glenwood's work force commuting

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from the midvalley. About 45 percent of Glenwood's workers are coming from points west along Interstate 70.

Also, a whopping 24 percent of Basalt's workers are coming from Rifle and Silt, according to the study. But only 3 percent of Aspen's work force comes from Rifle, Silt and New Castle, the survey showed, and no Aspen workers surveyed came from Parachute.

About 9 percent of Parachute's work force actually comes from Glenwood, the survey showed.

"It may all occur on the same corridor, but it's multidirectional and it can happen at any time of day," Laird said.

For a rural area, Laird added, an incredible percentage of people take Roaring Fork Transit Agency (RFTA) buses for at least some of their trips. And it's clear that more people have bus passes in the places where service is more frequent.

Seventy-five percent of those in Basalt responding to the study own bus passes, 58 percent of El Jebel residents own passes, and 51 percent of Carbondale residents have passes. Down in Glenwood, however, the percentage plummets to 14 percent, and Parachute, Rifle and New Castle all registered zero. Silt reported 5 percent.

"We've got a huge number of people taking the bus, but all of a sudden it drops in Glenwood," Laird said. "I think everybody realizes that it amounts to the level of service RFTA is able to provide."

Aspenites own fewer cars per household and per person than anywhere else in the valley — by far. Aspen reported 1.5 cars per household and 0.68 vehicles per person of driving age. The average was 2 vehicles per household and 0.91 cars per person.

Laird supposed that had to do with Aspen's walkable layout and the free and frequent bus service to outlying neighborhoods.

By contrast, El Jebel, Carbondale, Glenwood, Silt, Rifle and Parachute all reported one or more cars per person of driving age, on average. And every town from Basalt to Parachute reported an average of at least two cars per household.

Given that more Roaring Fork Valley workers seem to be coming from towns on the Interstate 70 corridor, Laird said, it would make sense to extend bus service along I-70. To that end, he has been leading recent discussions among numerous cities and counties from Parachute to Aspen concerning a regional transportation district.

Should the discussion ever lead to voter approval of a taxing district to fund transportation, he said, the money raised could be used to extend service to places like Rifle and Gypsum, or to create more frequent service between towns such as Carbondale and Glenwood.

RFTA's fastest-growing route is presently between Carbondale and Glenwood, but service is neither frequent nor designed to serve commuting workers.

"We'd probably have a lot more riders if that bus went to Glenwood before 9 a.m.," Laird said. "It's not a commuter bus."