

IMPACT OF COMMUNITY BIKE SHOPS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PATRONS

Report prepared by

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Executive Summary

Community bike shops (CBS) have an incredible impact on the communities they serve. Those who actively participate in CBS culture know that they are inclusive spaces where learning, empowerment, and community building takes place. However, while some CBS have the capacity to conduct yearly surveys to evaluate and improve their service to the community, many do not and could benefit from a simple evaluative survey to give them a basic understanding of the impact they are having on their patrons.

In response, a survey aimed at identifying the impacts of CBS from the perspective of patrons was sent out to numerous CBS across North America in 2018. 12 shops participated and 154 patrons responded to the survey.

The survey asked CBS patrons very broadly, “how important is having access to the shop?”. The open-ended responses were analyzed and we found that CBS provide patrons with...

- Access to bicycles, bicycle tools, bicycle parts, and education
- Confidence and empowerment through learning bicycle repair skills
- Skill development, including professional skills, interpersonal, and intra-personal skills
- Affordability for cycling
- A sense of community amongst the staff, volunteers, and patrons

Figure 1 illustrates the themes that emerged from the responses. Interestingly, these themes were found across the responses from patrons of different shops.



Part of the mission of every CBS is to provide a space where people can learn to fix their own bike and use tools for free or at an affordable price (either through a membership or a per hour fee), this is clearly achieved based on the comments of survey participants. Based on responses, CBS are places where people can purchase an affordable bike, fix their bikes, learn how to fix their bikes, and use expensive tools that would be too expensive to use otherwise. Furthermore, it is a space where patrons can gain many additional skills above and beyond bicycle maintenance, such as communication, patience, problem solving, conflict resolution, resilience, etc.; and participate in a larger community. Finally, CBS also contribute to encouraging accessible and affordable cycling amongst their patrons, which yields health and environmental benefits and increases one's quality of life.

By identifying overarching impacts of CBS, regardless of governance model, location, etc., we hope to create a more comprehensive understanding of the contributions of CBS and help shops make a case for more funding, more community support, and the existence of CBS in more municipalities.

Introduction

Community bike shops (CBS) provide an essential service in their respective communities. However, there are various models of governance and structure among CBS as well as different contexts between communities and municipalities. With this understanding and looking to further explore this natural phenomenon, Carla Teixeira proposed the use of formal research in the CBS context in 2017 at a presentation at Bike!Bike! Winnipeg. With the help of Stan Yu from Bridge City Bicycle Co-Op, a broad survey looking at the impacts of CBS from the patron's perspective was created in 2018 and sent out to various CBS around North America.

While the impacts of CBS are largely similar throughout, we understand that there are differences based on contextual factors (i.e. location, volunteer base, CBS model). This is why input from CBS patrons from across North America was sought. We aim to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how CBS contribute to their communities to make a case for more support, funding, and to make it easier to found new CBS in municipalities that do not have them. The survey closed at the end of 2019 and responses were analyzed. Individual reports for shops that had five responses or more were drafted and sent out in summer 2021. A brief summary and overview of results were presented at Bike!Bike! Everywhere 2021.

Understanding that the COVID-19 pandemic happened in between when the survey was active and when the reports were sent out and presented, we believe that the results in this report are even more important since COVID-19 has made bicycles more essential. The services that CBS provide to make cycling accessible are more impactful now since the retail prices of bikes, bike parts, and bike repair have gone up with demand.

Introduction (cont.)

In the following pages, you will find a brief summary of the responses given by patrons of participating shops with some quotes that highlight the impact that these CBS provide. All responses and participating shops are anonymous.

Our hope is that this information will be useful to 1) have a base understanding of the role of bikes in the lives of patrons, 2) identify the impacts that CBS have on patrons, and 3) utilize this knowledge for fundraising purposes. Fell free to use this report as you see fit and if you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Happy rides!

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Description of Protocol

A survey was designed to gather demographic information and general information from patrons about their bicycle usage and how they interact with their community bike shop (CBS; Appendix A). An email was sent to several CBS around North America informing them of the project and asking if they would be interested in participating. A total of 12 CBS responded with an expression of interest; these shops were emailed a survey link via Google Forms. Administrators from each CBS then promoted the survey so that patrons could participate. Towards the end of 2019, the survey was closed and analysis of the responses began.

Demographic information was gathered and averaged. Open ended responses were analyzed thematically and were ranked based on how many times they were mentioned by patrons. You will notice that there is a section of the survey captioned “Shop Specific Questions”; responses to these questions will not be reported here but they were written up in the individual shop reports and shared with their corresponding CBS.

The information below is a brief summary of the collective responses from all participating CBS. Quotes from patrons are used illustrate common themes regarding the shops and their services.

Description of Participants

A total of 154 patrons from 12 CBS across North America responded to the survey.

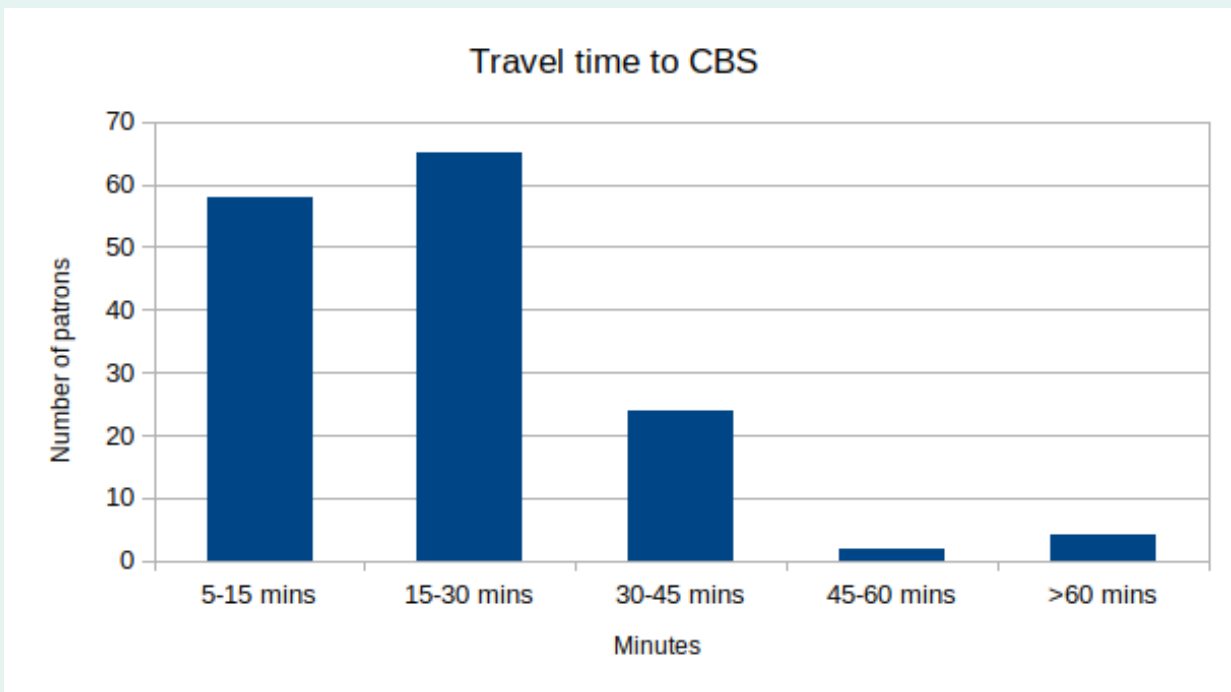
The average age of patrons was 37.6 years old.

Gender of participants:

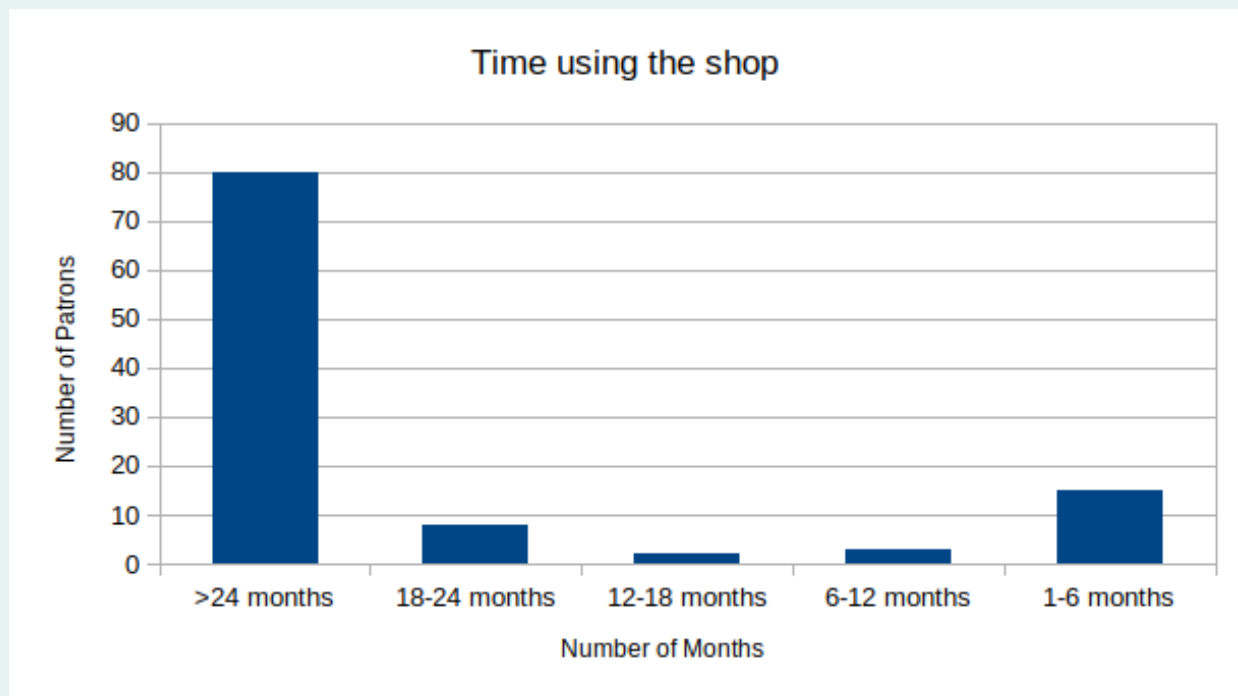
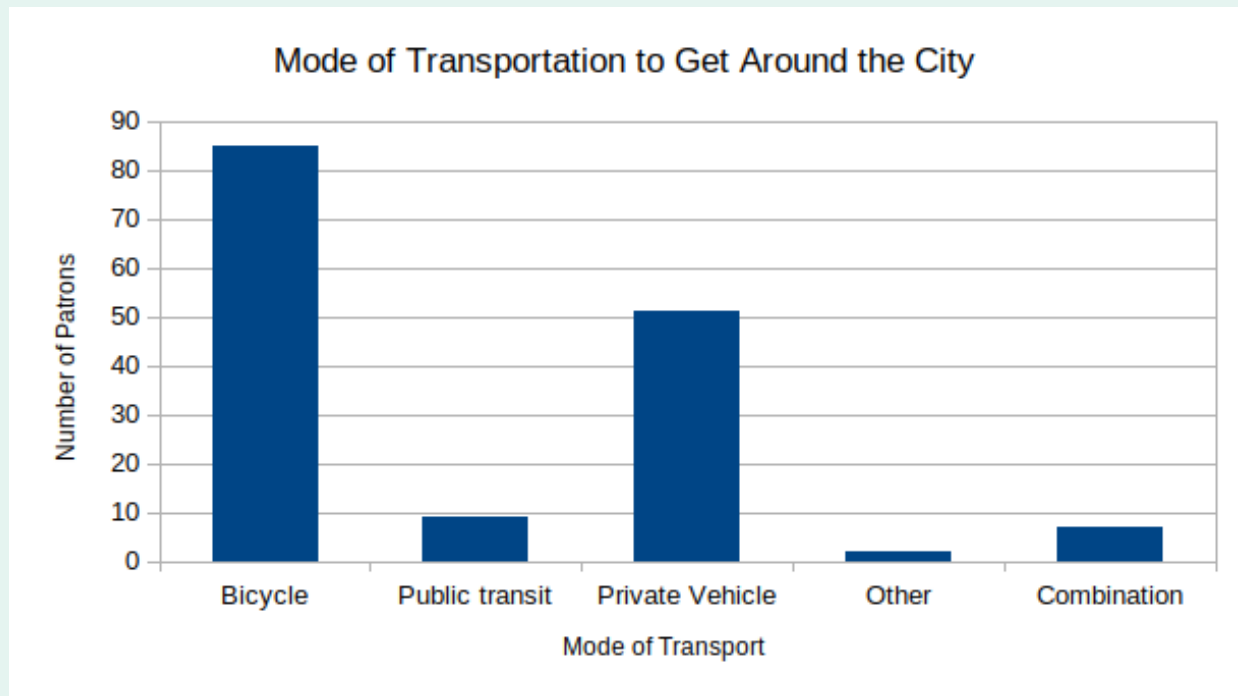
Female - 48

Male - 97

Other - 7



Description of Participants (cont.)



Results of Survey

The following responses represent sentiments from patrons at participating CBS regarding the role of bicycles, the shop's services and programming, and the impact these have had on patrons' lives.

CBS PATRONS RIDE A BIKE BECAUSE....

"I do not have a car but live in a car-centric city. I can rely on the bus but I'd rather have some agency. I bike because it gives me independence and freedom, and it's a good way to exercise while commuting to work. It's also really fun, so I enjoy going on slightly longer rides as a hobby."

"I ride because it is more convenient than the bus (set my own schedule, go at my own time, go places the bus may not); it is cheaper than a car (owning a car/paying insurance/paying parking) and because I like it (it gives me a sense of freedom, connects me with other cyclists, and ups my cool factor with strangers!). It's also better for my health and the environment, but those are not necessarily the reasons I ride, just great benefits."

"It's faster than walking, and easier on my back; I can carry a pretty good load of groceries, etc.; it is far easier to get around on a bike, and park a bike, than in a car (I also have my own reliable car); it feels less cumbersome than the car."

"To reduce my environmental impact. To feel less tied to fossil fuel. To have more ability to repair my means of transportation. Because I feel much better after arriving somewhere on bike compared to in a car."

"For health, for my sanity, one less car and less pollution, easier to get around the city and lastly, I just love it so much!"

CBS PATRONS RIDE A BIKE BECAUSE.... (CONT.)

“Clearly having access to a bicycle is not life or death, but I think it’s a big factor in quality of life. Being able to participate in an activity that makes life healthier and more fun, that gives a sense of empowerment and freedom, and that is both time and cost effective – all contribute to heightened quality of life.”

ACCESS TO CBS ALLOWS PATRONS TO...

“I have several bikes, and anyone that rides knows that there’s always something that needs to be fixed. Were it not for [CBS] I don’t think I ever would have learned a lot of the maintenance skills I have, and I certainly wouldn’t have access to all of the affordable used parts. Knowing how to do the work myself is empowering, but also helps me save a lot of money and time...”

“The shop has opened up doors for many in the community and is a huge confidence booster. It allows many people to have access to bikes and proper maintenance techniques and keeps old bikes and parts in service. It also provides a sense of community in itself.”

“It has empowered me to take care of my bicycle and take care of my family’s bicycles.”

“The shop provides specialty tools and expertise to fix my bicycle that I cannot get anywhere else without a large investment.”

“As a ‘shop’ it’s not particularly important to me. I buy all of my bike service at a professional shop not out of necessity but out of privilege. I only use the community shop as a place to convene with others and a place to teach others.”

ACCESS TO CBS ALLOWS PATRONS TO... (CONT.)

“Because bike tools are expensive and maintaining a bike can be cumbersome if you constantly have to take it to a mechanic or need those \$60 pedal wrenches. By using the space, I am able to save money and also do things myself with used parts – being sustainable with our choices to reuse rather than buy new.”

SKILLS ACQUIRED AT CBS INCLUDE...

“Understanding of all bike parts, fix a flat, brakes adjustment, derailleur adjustment, problem diagnosis, conflict resolution, group dynamics in non hierarchical organization, non profit [management] and volunteer coordination, social media [management], problem solving, deescalation tactics, mental health first aid, event planning and [management], note taking and meeting facilitation. WOW this kinda makes me tear up to think about how much bike co-ops have given me.”

“A wide range of bike maintenance skills. A few administrative skills, like how to use illustrator and the cash/inventory system. Also some people skills. Our bike shop is a very inclusive, welcoming place and I have learned some important things about how to deal with people.”

“I understand my bike. As a female new to riding, the bike mechanics course was so key in giving me confidence riding my bike.”

“Much better patience and people skills, especially when it comes to cooperation. Resilience. Perspective.”

Discussion

The information presented above represents a small but vocal number of community bike shop (CBS) patrons across North America and demonstrates the incredible impact that CBS have in their communities. From this data, we can infer that the majority of patrons who frequent CBS are adults over the age of 30, most patrons tend to be male, and reside very or relatively close to their home CBS. Patrons' responses also tell us that not all patrons are reliant on their bicycle for transportation, as 'private vehicle' was the second most reported mode of transportation by survey participants. This demonstrates that, while a majority of patrons use their bikes for utilitarian purposes, such as transportation, a significant number of patrons use their bikes for recreational purposes. Last but not least, most patrons who participated in this survey have been patrons for over two years. This is important to highlight as it points to the valuable services provided by CBS that retain patrons as volunteers and customers. However, it must also be noted that there is bias in this small survey since an involved patron is more likely to participate in an evaluation survey than an uninvolved patron. This is not to say that the responses given don't have merit, on the contrary, these responses come from patrons who have been the most impacted by their CBS and can attest to the benefits of having a CBS in their community.

When looking at why patrons ride their bikes, a lot of the responses revolve around self-centered reasons such as convenience, affordability, health, and enjoyment. The environmental and community aspects are also mentioned and emphasized, but the personal benefits come first and more often. As cycling advocates and engaged citizens who look to improve our communities, this information can provide a way to shape

Discussion (cont.)

messaging regarding the uptake of cycling; promoting the personal benefits first, and the environmental and community benefits second. All in the hope that it will get more people on bikes for the above mentioned results.

CBS aim to be spaces where people have access to affordable bikes and parts, can learn to fix their own bike, and have access to tools that would be too expensive to use otherwise (they do this through a membership or a per hour fee model). Based on responses to the survey, patrons agree that CBS are fulfilling their mission of making bikes and bike servicing more accessible. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, bikes, bike services, and bike parts have all skyrocketed in price and demand. The importance and impact of CBS is greater now than ever before due to this heightened interest in bikes and a higher financial entry-point for a quality bike.

The impacts of a CBS, however, should not be limited to those who cannot afford retail bike shop prices. There are patrons who are able to afford and use the services of professional bike shops, yet they frequent CBS for the community and teaching aspect. It is important to note these connections between CBS and cyclists; connections that surpass economic class and get to the root of what it means to be part of a cycling community where the point is to get as many people on bikes so everyone can enjoy the benefits that we do.

Discussion (cont.)

And speaking of benefits, CBS patrons have access to more than just bikes, bike parts, and bike repair knowledge. By becoming involved in a CBS, patrons have the opportunity to learn skills beyond those relating to a bike and develop more inter- and intra-personal skills. Because the patronage at CBS is so diverse, people from all different walks of life tend to interact and come together. This is not to say that the experience is always positive. However, it is important to note that by creating a space where people from different backgrounds can meet and interact, CBS are a unique place where growth and development, that is not bike related, can occur.

Every shop has its strengths and shortcomings and the dynamics change frequently as volunteers and staff come and go. CBS play an important role in the communities in which they are situated but the magnitude of their impact is often dictated by the involvement of those who are active in the CBS. By evaluating our strategies and identifying what we're doing right and what we can improve on, we can strengthen our CBS and increase the reach of the services that make cycling accessible.

Conclusion

The purpose of this report is to provide a brief overview of the impact that community bike shops (CBS) have on patrons. While only a small number of patrons participated in this survey, the information presented here can provide value to all CBS. My hope is that the information found on this report can be useful for funding applications, to create an evaluation framework for your own CBS, and to be able to reference a document when talking about the impact of CBS. Active members and volunteers within the CBS network know that this report only scratches the surface in regards to the impact of CBS, but it is work that creates a foundation to be built upon in the future.

I hope that this report is useful to you and your organization. Thank you for all that you do to improve health and bike accessibility in your community!

**The bicycle is a tool for recreation, transportation,
and transformation.**

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Appendix A

Survey

- **What is your age?**
- **What is your gender?**
- **How long do you usually have to travel to get to the shop?**
 - **5-15 mins**
 - **15-30 mins**
 - **30-45 mins**
 - **45-60 mins**
 - **> 60 mins**
- **What mode of transportation do you normally use to get around the city?**
 - **Bicycle**
 - **Public transit**
 - **Walking**
 - **Private vehicle (car, motorcycle, etc.)**
 - **Other**
- **How long have you used the shop?**
 - **1-6 months**
 - **6-12 months**
 - **12-18 months**
 - **18-24 months**
 - **>24 months**

(THE FOLLOWING ARE OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS)

- **Why do you ride a bicycle?**
- **On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being not important at all and 10 being very important, how important is having access to a bicycle? Please explain.**

Appendix A (cont.)

- **On a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being not important at all and 10 being very important, how important is having access to the shop? Please explain.**
- **Besides getting your bicycle fixed or getting a bicycle, why do you come to the shop?**
- **What skills have you developed since you started using the shop?**

(THE FOLLOWING ARE SHOP SPECIFIC QUESTIONS)

- **What is your favourite program/service that the shop provides? Why?**
- **What are some things that this shop could improve?**
- **What are some programs/services you would like to see in the future?**