

Impaired Driving in Madison:
Full Data Tables

Themes from our focus groups on impaired driving

Important features in a ride share program

- **Timing and convenience.** Convenience is an important factor in making safe transportation choices. The slower nature of public transit or waiting for a ride share compared to using a personal vehicle makes the decision to drive much easier for people. People noted that buses often stop service before peak nightlife hours and may not reach all areas where people are going, reducing options depending on time and location.

- **Safety**. Physical and emotional safety concerns can be major barriers to using ride-share and alternative transportation services. People expressed discomfort with unvetted drivers and shared concerns about drivers following riders home, making unsettling comments about previous trips, or stalking passengers. They also described negative experiences with some cab services, including drivers charging additional fees when they knew passengers were impaired or threatening to end rides early. People emphasized the need for greater transparency and control, including knowing who their driver is in advance, having the ability to decline a driver, and access to real-time location tracking and easy reporting options.

- **Choosing the driver.** Concerns about driver quality were common, including comments about inadequate training, limited information about drivers, and predatory practices such as charging intoxicated passengers extra and threatening to leave them stranded. Some participants preferred app-based services because they provide information about drivers, reviews, and pricing before the ride.

- **Tailoring by subgroup.** Differences in digital familiarity can affect use of transportation programs, as app-based services may be easier for younger users while older adults may prefer phone-line options. Financial obstacles limit alternative transportation options, particularly for students and lower-income people. Ride-shares may also be too expensive for people who live in neighborhoods farther away from downtown, making driving a more affordable option. Safe ride programs should prioritize serving underserved neighborhoods, address gaps in transportation access, and offer more than one way to request rides.

Recommendations for a potential media campaign about impaired driving

- **Messages by subgroup.**
    - **Community connectedness**: The effectiveness of community-oriented messaging about impaired driving depends heavily on a person's sense of belonging and mental health. While positive, collaborative slogans (e.g. "We're in this together") resonate strongly with connected, they may alienate people who do not feel valued by or connected to their community.
    - **Risk tolerance:** campaign messaging focused on physical harm, like crash test dummy footage, can create strong emotional reactions. However, participants noted that scare tactics may be less effective for people with higher risk tolerance or a sense of invincibility.
    - **Masculine norms**: Toxic masculinity prevents some men from feeling the impact of these messages because they may be socialized to feel fearless or dismiss risks. Campaign slogans that focus on



responsibility to others on the road may be less effective when social norms for men about invincibility can dismiss these messages. Messaging should balance realistic consequences with approaches that empower people to make responsible decisions.

  - **Gender-based safety:** For women, non-binary, and transgender riders, ride-share safety is a major concern. This was highlighted by incidents such as drivers attempting to follow riders home, drivers telling women riders that they recognize them from previous rides, and instances of women being stalked. Programs were mentioned like *Women in Transit* and UW campus-specific safe rides that have helped some participants feel more secure about using the service.

- **Addressing perceived cost of alternatives.** Focus group participants said that people may view paying for a cab or ride-share as less worthwhile than risking a parking ticket, since the cost of a ticket isn't guaranteed. Some also viewed walking as a better option because it is free, even though walking while impaired can still be dangerous. Long distances between downtown and neighborhoods can make rideshare fares expensive, leading some people to view driving themselves as the cheaper option, even with the risk of an expensive OWI penalty. Emphasizing free or low-cost options is important in campaign messaging.

- **Avoiding shame-based messaging.** Lecturing, commanding, and shame-based messaging did not resonate with focus group participants. They rejected paternalistic or overly aggressive scare tactics, such as those associated with the D.A.R.E. program, noting that these approaches can feel patronizing and create resentment. Instead, people favored messages that used social norming, humor, quirky road signs, and reflective messaging that encourages people to consider their own decisions. Examples included "Mistakes happen, but this one is preventable." Campaign messaging should encourage personal reflection and responsibility without making people feel judged or lectured.

- **Social norming solution.** Messages that tell an audience how often people get shares when they're impaired may be an effective campaign solution since fear tactics and community-centered messages did not resonate well with focus groups. Social norming messages serve as impactful behavioral motivators because they remind the public what the majority group does.

Longer-term solutions for preventing impaired driving

- **High-risk drinking culture.** Normalization of impaired driving among peers can create a false sense of safety. During high-risk situations, people may rely on automatic thinking, such as simply thinking "it's time to get home," rather than assessing whether they are fit to drive. People assume that safe rides are only necessary for people who are extremely intoxicated, overlooking the risks of milder impairment. Cultural shifts are needed to reframe safe rides as important whenever someone has used a substance that could affect their ability to drive.

- **Bar culture.** Some bars and casino environments may prioritize profit over public health and safety by promoting heavy drinking through drink specials and overserving. Some participants said that laws like no off-premises liquor sales after 9 pm in Wisconsin result in more people going to bars, creating more opportunities for impaired driving. Prevention efforts are needed around overserving, retailer laws, and alcohol outlet density.

- **Built environment.** The physical arrangement of communities can limit transportation options and make impaired driving more likely, especially in a car-oriented society. Participants said that bars and restaurants in rural and suburban areas are often located far from residential neighborhoods, creating geographic isolation and making alternative transportation less accessible. These areas also have fewer public transportation options.



- **Partnerships and trust.** Participants said that programs are more likely to succeed when they are rooted in the community. They also pointed to campus initiatives, such as past "safe walk/ride" programs at UW-Madison, as good examples of how institutional trust and visibility can make people feel safe using a service. Alcohol-serving establishments also play an important role in promoting and supporting safe rides. Bartenders need to be informed, engaged, and aware of available programs for them to gain traction. Advertising in bars and liquor stores can make safe transportation options more visible when they are most needed.

Survey Data

Table 1: What is your age group?

Age	Percent
18-20	3%
21-24	16%
25–34	28%
35–54	36%
55–64	10%
65+	7%

Table 2: How do you describe your gender? (select all that apply)

Gender	Percent
Woman	65%
Man	33%
Non-binary, Gender queer, Gender non-conforming	2%
Transgender	0%
Don't know	0%
Don't want to answer	0%
Gender not listed - Write In	0%

Table 3: How do you describe your race or ethnicity?

Race/Ethnicity	Percent
White	56%
Black or African American	17%
Latinx or Hispanic	15%
Asian	8%
Don't want to answer	7%
Native, American Indian, or Indigenous	3%
Another race	2%



Table 4: Where in Madison do you live most of the time?

Neighborhood	Percent
West Side	24%
Downtown or Isthmus	15%
South/Southwest Side	11%
Near Eastside	10%
Northside	10%
Near Westside	8%
East Side	10%
Far East Side	6%
I do not live in Madison	3%
Far West Side	3%

Table 5: What's your current housing situation? Choose one.

Housing Status	Percent
Stable/Housed (i.e. Own or Rent – home, apartment, room, mobile home)	85%
Temporary/Unstable (i.e. Shelter, Motel, Couch Surfing, Transitional Housing, Sober Living)	7%
Unhoused (i.e. street, car, encampment, abandoned building, houseless)	5%
Don't want to answer	3%

Table 6: How do you get around Madison most of the time? Choose up to two options.

Transportation	Percent
Personal car/vehicle	62%
Walk	39%
Bus	34%
Bicycle	16%
Ride Share (Ex: Taxi, Uber, Lyft)	15%



Table 7: Please rate how much you think using these substances or experiencing these factors within 2 hours of driving impacts a person's risks of a car crash.

Answer Choices	I don't know	No risk	Little risk	Medium risk	Severe risk
Using multiple substances at the same time (Ex: Alcohol and THC, or Cocaine and Alcohol)	0%	0%	2%	4%	94%
Alcohol (Ex: Beer, Wine, Liquor)	0%	2%	2%	17%	79%
Heroin or Fentanyl	15%	2%	2%	2%	79%
Meth	13%	2%	2%	9%	74%
Cocaine or Crack	13%	2%	6%	9%	70%
Other psychedelics (Ex: Mushrooms, LSD)	13%	4%	2%	11%	70%
MDMA (Ecstasy or Molly)	21%	2%	0%	13%	64%
Lack of sleep (Ex: Inability to fall asleep, All Nighters)	2%	2%	4%	30%	62%
Ketamine	25%	4%	2%	13%	57%
Other Prescription Opioids (Ex: OxyContin, Percocet, Vicodin)	21%	2%	2%	26%	49%
Inhalants (Ex: Whippets, Poppers)	28%	4%	4%	19%	45%
Cannabis/ THC (Ex: Edibles, Flower, Tinctures)	2%	0%	6%	49%	43%
Benzodiazepines (Ex: Xanax, Valium, Adivan)	21%	4%	6%	28%	42%
Methadone	42%	6%	2%	13%	37%
Over-The-Counter Medicines that are sleep aids (Ex: Cough syrups, Benedryl, Nyquil, Unisom, Melatonin)	4%	4%	11%	47%	34%
Caffeine intake (Ex: Coffee, Red Bull)	6%	23%	53%	11%	8%



Table 8: In your opinion, how much do the following things play a role in why people drive within 2 hours of using substances?

Answer Choices	I don't know	Not a reason	Somewhat of a reason	A major reason
They Think They're Fine: Believing the substance doesn't impact driving abilities.	2%	5%	23%	70%
Parking ticket or tow anxiety: Fear of getting a parking ticket or being towed if they leave their car behind.	13%	9%	36%	43%
No Other Timely Way to Home or Work: Feeling like there are no reliable Ubers, Lyfts, or buses that will get them to their next destination on time.	11%	9%	38%	42%
Cost: Rideshares and/or public transit options are too expensive.	5%	11%	45%	38%
The "Sober" Driver Changed: Having a plan for a sober driver, but that person ended up using a substance anyway.	11%	7%	48%	34%
Privacy: Not wanting to ask for a ride or have others "in their business.	13%	21%	38%	29%
Social Pressure: Feeling like they have to keep up with friends or that it's "normal" in their group.	5%	18%	53%	24%
No Other Way to Manage Symptoms: Someone feeling like they must use a substance to handle pain or panic before they can leave the house.	29%	18%	32%	21%
Feeling "Invisible" or Hopeless: The person feeling like it doesn't matter what happens to them.	23%	27%	30%	20%
Ride share/Transportation Safety Concerns: Feeling unsafe using ride-shares or public transit.	7%	21%	52%	20%
Mental Health Emergencies: Needing to drive to get help or safety after using a substance to cope with a crisis.	25%	25%	36%	14%
Stress or Anxiety: Needing to get somewhere and feeling overwhelmed or panicked so they use a substance before driving.	23%	27%	38%	13%

Table 9: If someone in Madison does not currently use public transportation services to get home safely after using substances, what changes would help increase the likelihood they would use them? Select the 2-3 most useful improvements.

Answer choices	Percent
More frequent & later service at night	71%
Lower cost/Free fare programs	50%
Stops located closer to destination	34%
“Last Mile” ride share vouchers to get from the final bus stop to final destination.	29%
Better lighting & security at stops	23%
Discounted "return bus trip" voucher to get back to vehicle the next morning.	20%
Certainty to not be judged or harassed	16%
Easier access to real-time arrival bus information	13%
Other	4%



Table 10: If someone in Madison does not currently use ride share services to get home safely after using substances, what changes would help increase the likelihood that they would use them? Select the top 2-3 most useful improvements.

Answer choices	Percent
The ride was free, discounted, or cost less than $5.	75%
No risk of parking tickets or tows for vehicles left overnight.	41%
Guaranteed pickup in under 10 minutes.	34%
A discounted "return trip" voucher to get back to vehicle the next morning.	30%
Request a ride via a physical kiosk, with front desk or venue staff (no smartphone/app required).	27%
Guaranteed access to "highly-rated" or "safety-certified" drivers	25%
Ability to pay cash or a pre-loaded "City Safety Card" instead of a linked credit card.	14%
Brighter lighting & clearer "Safe Zone" signage at designated pickup areas.	13%
Other	5%

Table 11: Where do you think these messages would be most effective at reaching someone? Choose the 2-3 most effective messaging locations.

Answer choices	Percent
Inside bars, restaurants, or convenient stores.	75%
On social media (Facebook, Instagram, etc.)	62%
At bus stops or on the side of Metro buses	34%
On digital road signs or billboards	34%
On posters in parking garages and parking lots.	26%
On posters in community centers	17%
Through a text alert	15%
Other (please specify)	4%



Table 12: Where are the most effective places to display impaired driving messages in Madison?

Answer choices	Percent
Everywhere in Madison equally	49%
Downtown/Isthmus	43%
East Side	17%
Far East Side	17%
West Side	9%
Far West Side	9%
Near Westside	8%
Near Eastside	8%
South/Southwest Side	6%
Northside	2%

Table 13: Who would you most trust to share these safety messages with you? choose the top 2-3 most trustworthy messengers.

Answer choices	Percent
A peer or fellow Madison resident	58%
A local business owner or bartender	58%
A community leader	46%
A victim's advocate or family member	37%
A healthcare professional	37%
A law enforcement officer	13%
A housing or apartment manager	6%
A government agency	4%



Table 14: Which of these messages about the risks of impaired driving feels most impactful to you? Choose 1 that resonates most.

Messages	Percent
“An OWI/DUI can cost $10,000 in fees and lost wages. Is one ride home worth your entire savings?”	25%
“Mistakes happen, but this one is preventable. Secure your car, secure your night.”	19%
“Impairment affects your brain before you even realize it. If you feel different, you drive different.”	13%
“Even slight impairment risks the families and workers sharing the road with you.”	12%
“Think about the people who count on you—your family, your coworkers, your friends. Don't risk being taken away from them.”	10%
“Your reaction time slows down long before you feel drunk or high. Even a ‘little bit’ is too much to drive safely.	10%
“A single moment behind the wheel can lead to a lifetime of regret and lost opportunities.”	8%
“In the time it takes to watch a TV show, a life is lost to impaired driving. Don’t let the next 42 minutes be your last or someone else’s.”	4%
None of the above	2%

Table 15: Which of these messages about community care and impaired driving feels most impactful to you personally? Choose 1 that resonates most.

Messages	Percent
“It’s okay to not be okay to drive. There’s no shame in calling for backup.”	28%
“We all look out for each other. If you’ve been under the influence, let someone else take the wheel.”	28%
“Your community is better with you in it. Let’s get you home safely tonight.”	21%
“Protecting the people you love starts with the choice you make right now.”	13%
“You are a valued part of this neighborhood. Drive sober for all of us.”	8%
None of the above	6%
Other (please specify)	8%