Travel for Food in Vermont and Northern New England

The National Household Transportation Survey (NHTS) is a comprehensive survey of personal travel in the U.S conducted by the U.S. Department of Transportation approximately every eight years. Information was gathered on 3,550 people in 1,690 households in Vermont. According to the NHTS results, on average, Vermonters traveled 6.7 miles ± 10.3 standard deviation for shopping trips (one-way), which included trips for groceries, clothing and hardwares. This distance is longer than the national household average of 5.6 miles ± 9.1 standard deviation.

The NHTS classifies households as urban areas (densely populated areas with a population of at least 50,000 people), urban clusters (densely populated areas between 2,500 and 50,000 people) and rural. Compared to residents of rural areas and urban clusters, people living in urban areas tended to make a greater proportion of shopping trips under a mile and a much smaller proportion over 10 miles.

Vermonters’ trips for meals outside of the home were 8.9 miles on average. Most trips to dine out either originated from home (42%) or were chained with shopping trips (18%).

Additional information on Vermonters’ travel for food can be found in the New England Travel Survey (NETS) and the Travel in Your Life survey (TIYL). The NETS was administered by the New England Transportation Institute in 2008 and collected information from more than 3,500 residents of northern New England. The TIYL survey was conducted by the University of Vermont Center for Rural Studies in 2009, who collected data from approximately 1,400 individuals in northern New England.

According to the NETS, the median reported trip length from home to the grocery store in Vermont was 8.1 miles, a distance felt to be too long by nearly a fifth of respondents.

The TIYL survey used a 1 to 10 scale (10 high). Residents of all states highly value the presence of a grocery store in their community, although it appears communities in Vermont may be less likely to offer such stores (Table 2). Approximately 95% of respondents in both Maine and New Hampshire reported being able to access the grocery store as often as they like, and 92% of respondents in Vermont reported being able to access the grocery store as often as they liked. Access to restaurants was not rated to be as important among TIYL survey respondents.

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